

What's the Evidence? Summary of an Existing Report

Therapies based on sensory integration in Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Published May 2011, based on review from 2009

Update 2018

- There have been a number of published systematic reviews looking at the evidence for therapies based on sensory integration. The two most recent systematic reviews were published in 2015.
- Both reviews call for larger and more rigorous trials of therapies based on sensory integration in order to evaluate their effect on children with ASD and sensory processing problems.^{1,2}
- There remains uncertainty about therapies based on sensory integration, as highlighted in Nancy Pollock's 2009 review.
- Currently, there is a large trial funded by the research arm of the NHS. You can read about the trial here [Randomised Controlled Trial of Sensory Integration Therapy versus usual care for sensory processing difficulties in Autism Spectrum Disorder in children](#).

2011 Summary

Sensory Integration is a theory about how we react to our environment in terms of sensations such as sounds, colours and smells. The theory suggests that some children have problems with sensory integration which could be responsible for behaviours such as trouble organising themselves, learning new skills and participating in play or school activities. Nancy Pollock wrote a considered review of the current state of the evidence regarding the theory of sensory integration and the therapies that have been developed around it. Nancy concludes "the topic of sensory integration remains contentious. Its theoretical underpinnings, its existence as a distinct disorder, and the effectiveness of treatment approaches based on the theory are still under debate."³

References

- 1 Case-Smith, J., Weaver, L.L., and Fristad, M.A. (2015) A systematic review of sensory processing interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism*. 19(2): 133–148.
- 2 Watling, R., & Hauer, S. (2015). Effectiveness of Ayres Sensory Integration® and sensory-based interventions for people with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 69(5).
- 3 Pollock, N. (2009) Sensory integration: A review of the current state of the evidence. *Occupational Therapy Now*. 11(5): 6-10. Available at: <https://canchild.ca/en/resources/81-sensory-integration-a-review-of-the-current-state-of-the-evidence>

We would like to hear your feedback on this summary – please email penclu@exeter.ac.uk if you have any comments or questions.