Peninsula Cerebra Research Unit
PenCRU Childhood Disability Research

What's the Evidence?

Feldenkrais and Anat Baniel for children with cerebral palsy

Key findings

- The Feldenkrais Method, and the Anat Baniel Method which is based on Feldenkrais, are therapies aimed at improving movement abilities for a wide range of people and conditions.
- There is no research evidence to suggest that either therapy might be effective for children with cerebral palsy.

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What were we asked?

A physiotherapist asked us if there was any evidence that The Feldenkrais Method or Anat Baniel Method are effective therapies for children with cerebral palsy.

What did we do?

We searched a range of academic databases including NHS Evidence, the TRIP database, The Cochrane Library, Pubmed and NICE guidelines.

What are these therapies?

What is Feldenkrais?

- The Feldenkrais Method, or Feldenkrais, aims to reduce pain and movement limitations and improve physical function by increasing self-awareness of movement.
- It is a movement education, or way of thinking, rather than a physical therapy.
- The exact structure of therapy delivery depends on the individual. We didn't find any specific information about the recommended number of therapy sessions for children with cerebral palsy.

What is the Anat Baniel Method?

- The Anat Baniel Method is a series of movement exercises based on the principles of Feldenkrais.
- The method claims to help children with cerebral palsy by 'forming new neural connections and patterns' in their brains and 'turning on their learning switch'.
- One session is held every 2-4 weeks, and one session consists of 5-10 lessons within a five day period.
- In the 2-4 weeks between sessions, only 1-2 lessons are given each week.
- The exact format and timings of sessions depends on the needs of the child.

What did we find?

- There is no rigorous research evidence evaluating the effectiveness of Feldenkrais or Anat Baniel therapies on children with cerebral palsy.

Feldenkrais

- There are some studies that have looked at the impact of Feldenkrais on other conditions. These studies were of poor methodological quality and report inconsistent findings.[1]
- A case study of a child with cerebral palsy has suggested that the child improved their movement abilities after a year of Feldenkrais therapy.[2]
- However, it is not possible to tell from this case study whether the child would have made the same improvements anyway, as children are developing all the time.
- It is also unlikely that the therapy would be expected have the same effect on another child with cerebral palsy, since we cannot generalise this result to all children with cerebral palsy.

The Anat Baniel Method

- The Anat Baniel Method claims to have small impacts on children's abilities from the very first lesson.
- This claim is not backed up by any scientific evidence.
- The Anat Baniel Method claims to have this effect by helping children's brains form new neural connections and patterns, 'upgrading the functioning of the brain itself to become a more skilled brain'.
- This claim is not backed up by any scientific research evidence, nor does the Anat Baniel website cite any evidence or theoretical basis for the claim.

What do we think?

There is no research evidence to suggest that the Feldenkrais Method or the Anat Baniel Method are effective therapies for children with cerebral palsy.

Parents should always consult their child's paediatrician before undertaking any therapies not prescribed or recommended by the NHS.

We would like to hear your feedback on this summary – please email us at pencru@exeter.ac.uk if you have any comments.

References

1. Ernst and Canter. 2005. The Feldenkrais Method – A systematic review of randomised controlled trials. Phys Rehab Kur Med. 15 (3) 151-156.

2. Shelhav-Silberbush. 1988. The Feldenkrais Method for children with Cerebral Palsy. Published master's thesis. Boston University School of Education, USA.

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