

Sensory Processing Disorder

Sensory processing is a term that refers to the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses. Whether you are biting into a hamburger, riding a bicycle or reading a book, your successful completion of the activity requires processing sensation or “sensory integration.”

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition that exists when sensory signals don’t get organized into appropriate responses. SPD is like a neurological “traffic jam” that prevents certain parts of the brain from receiving the information needed to interpret sensory information correctly. A person with SPD finds it difficult to process and act upon information received through the senses, which creates challenges in performing countless everyday tasks. Motor clumsiness, behavioral problems, anxiety, depression, school failure and other impacts may result if the disorder is not treated effectively.

Your child may have a sensory processing disorder if he or she:

- Has trouble focusing and/or concentrating.
- Is overly sensitive to loud sounds, such as vacuums and blenders.
- Shields eyes from the sun and other bright lights.
- Has “selective” hearing or difficulty listening.
- Always smelling people, food and objects.
- Is a picky eater; resists new foods and textures.
- Seems unaware of normal touch or pain; often touches others too hard or too soft.
- Chews on everything.
- Has poor fine motor skills, such as handwriting and cutting.
- Complains about tags in his or her clothing.
- Hates having hair washed, brushed or cut.
- Has difficulty dressing.
- Sits with legs in the “W” position.
- Hates being tickled or cuddled.
- Puts socks on “just so” or doesn’t ever go barefoot.
- Has poor gross motor skills, such as running or riding a bike.
- Always walks on tip toes.

How is a sensory processing disorder managed?

An occupational therapist will evaluate the specific areas where processing sensory information is difficult for the child. Treatment will consist of setting goals that match your child’s level of needs, setting expectations and educating parents on activities that can be incorporated into daily living at home, socially, in school and on the job.

