

# Pediatric Development Center



~ Newsletter ~  
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We provide occupational therapy evaluation, treatment and consultation for children with developmental delays, autism/Asperger, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, sensory processing disorders, attention, behavioral concerns, handwriting, and other areas of weakness.

Contact us for further information:

125 Presumpscot St.  
Portland, ME.  
(207) 699-5531

## Good Resources:

[www.integrationscatalog.com](http://www.integrationscatalog.com)

[www.therapro.com](http://www.therapro.com)

## The "Load Down" on Weights

-Cecilia Cruse, MS,  
OTR/L

Weights have traditionally been used for rehabilitation and strengthening. When working with children who have sensory challenges, weight becomes a powerful tool for providing heavy-work input to the muscles and joints. A weighted vest, for example, provides additional sensory input which may help a child feel more calm and organized and improve his awareness of body in space. Many children respond to this type of heavy-work input but not all children can work with weights. For example, weights are not appropriate for children with muscular dystrophy, increased tone or where a joint might be compromised. Ask your physical or occupational therapist for more advice and learn how your child may feel better when "weighted down."



## Weigh me Down or Hold me Tight!

-Cecilia Cruse, MS,  
OTR/L

The question is...Does my child need weight or pressure input? The answer is...it depends. We all respond differently to touch and pressure. Some of us like strong hugs, others don't. Sleeping under layers of blankets is appealing to one child, while another may want no covers at all. Children along the autism spectrum disorder, those with ADHD, sensory processing disorders or other neurological challenges often respond well to either weight or pressure. These "heavy work" or deep pressure inputs help regulate the proprioceptive sensory system which in turn helps children develop improved body awareness. When additional weight or pressure is applied to the body, it may help the sensory system calm down and organize so that the child can then attend better to tasks and/or maintain more appropriate behaviors and avoid meltdowns. Some

children may need the pressure applied for longer steady intervals (a pressure vest) while others respond to interval deep pressure input (weighted vest) with on and off wearing periods.

Every child's sensory system is unique so be sure to collaborate with your child's occupational or physical therapist to help find that just right combination to "weigh me down or hold me tight!"

Products that Hug & Squeeze Help Calm, Normalize & Integrate Sensory Information  
-Sue Wilkinson, OT

An infant's sensory system is immature and calms to the deep even and firm pressure of swaddling. Similarly, an individual's system that is under significant stress or is immature in the way it processes sensory input will also respond significantly to these deep pressure receptors. This technique is often used successfully with individuals who are easily distracted, hyperactive or lacking concentration. These

individuals respond positively to the additional weight some products provide. Depending on individual preference, some people prefer "tightness" such as bike shorts and LYCRA based wraps. Others prefer the "heaviness" of beanbag chairs, backpacks filled to the brim, and weighted products. Some individuals prefer both. Pay attention to what the individual is seeking in the natural environment.



Why Vibration?  
-Sue Wilkinson, OT

Did you know vibration offers calming and organizing input for most people? The activation of touch receptors and deep touch receptors is why massage is so relaxing and invigorating.

The mouth and face have enormous sensitivity. By providing chew opportunities that involve vibration, very often a child can

organize and calm down. It is important to allow individuals to explore vibration on their own terms and pace.

Whether an individual has hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity, vibration helps to "normalize" sensation. Vibration tools benefit individuals who:

- \* frequently chew on the necklines of their shirts
- \* bite others
- \* are picky eaters especially because they are sensitive to textures in the mouth
- \* dislike having their teeth brushed or face washed
- \* are diagnosed with autism or autistic spectrum disorders such as pervasive developmental delay
- \* need to strengthen mouth muscles by chewing
- \* are adults with significant self-injury due to biting "behaviors"
- \* are in the sensory-motor stage of play such as toddlers
- \* have been tube fed and have aversion to eating
- \* have discomfort in the mouth such as teething or TMJ