

SPD (Sensory Processing Disorder) FACT SHEET

Baby Lisa is irritable, sleeps lightly and fusses constantly unless swaddled tightly. Jerome stands back and watches other children climb and swing on the playground because he can't stand the feeling of his feet off the ground. Sarah sits in class chewing the end of her braid; her parents have often noticed her shirt neckline and cuffs soaked when she arrives home from school. She also frequently falls off her chair when her teacher asks her to sit properly. Matthew can't stand the feeling of his socks when they slide down his leg. He spends so much time adjusting his socks and he cries if he can't get them feeling just right. Jack often cries when his parents leave him at the pre-school room door; he settles in time, but remains close to the door watching the children play; he eventually walks over to the children playing in the block center and knocks their tower over.

Sixteen year old Luther displays several sensory sensitivities: he claims he always needs to wear his hoodie even though it's hot outside; he hates group sports because it's 'too hard & noisy'; he only eats cheese pizza and says all other food is slimy and smelly! Mary complains of feeling dizzy when driving around a traffic circle; she must wear headphones when attending her karate class and has been known to flee from social events "because I just feel overwhelmed".

Recognize any of these behaviours? These individuals show the symptoms of Sensory Processing Disorder.

What is SPD (SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER), previously known as Sensory Integration Dysfunction?

"...is a condition that exists when sensory signals *don't* get organized into appropriate responses. Pioneering occupational therapist and neuroscientist A. Jean Ayres, PhD, likened SPD to 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." (<http://www.spdfoundation.net/about-sensory-processing-disorder.html>)

Sensory Processing Disorder can affect anyone. Research studies indicated that 5% to 16% of children exhibit symptoms of SPD (Ahn, Miller, Milberger, & McIntosh, 2004; Ben-Sasson, Carter, & Briggs-Gowan, 2009).

Sensory processing challenges can present as one or more of the following:

- Delays with gross and fine motor skills (e.g., riding a bike, handwriting)
- Challenges with social skills and making friends
- Difficulty maintaining attention and completing tasks
- Difficulty organizing and planning multi-step tasks (e.g., dressing, school/work projects)
- Sensitivity to foods, smells, tastes and textures
- Difficulty with unexpected sensory inputs (e.g., touch, movement, sounds)
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Always on the move and seeking sensory input from the environment (e.g., trouble sitting still, touching others, loud voice, seeks rough play from others that may be disruptive)
- Falls and tumbles frequently, appears clumsy
- Avoidance of group activities at school and in the community and/or workplace
- Teens and adults may seek drugs, alcohol or intense physical stimulation
- Sexual disorders and difficulty with intimacy

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Other conditions and disorders commonly associated with SPD include:

- Anxiety and related disorders
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other developmental disorders/syndrome
- Behavioral issues
- Eating Disorders
- Expressive and Receptive Language Disorders
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorders

What should I do if I suspect sensory processing issues with a family member or myself?:

1. **Seek out an evaluation** with a registered Occupational Therapist who has experience with children or adults with SPD (contact your provincial association of occupational therapists or the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) to find an Occupational Therapist (OT) with specialized training in sensory processing/integration).
2. **Educate** yourself through websites, books and workshops.
3. **Join a support network.**

SPD is a condition that may be difficult to recognize and understand. Sensations that may not even bother some individuals may be painful to those with SPD and can interfere with function. Strategies, education and treatment can make a huge difference for those with SPD and their families. Understanding and management of sensory issues can help decrease symptoms and enable those affected, lead productive and satisfying lives.

Resources:

CAOT Sensory Processing Network

www.spdfoundation.net

www.thespiralfoundation.org

Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder by *Lucy Jane Miller, PhD, OTR*

References:

- Ahn, R., Miller, L., Milberger, S., & McIntosh, D. (2004). Prevalence of parents' perceptions of sensory processing disorders among kindergarten children. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 58*(3), 287-293.
- Ben-Sasson, A., Carter, A. S., & Briggs-Gowan, M. J. (2009). Sensory over-responsivity in elementary school: Prevalence and social-emotional correlates. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 37*(5), 705-716.