

Therapeutic Listening® and its use in occupational therapy and sensory integrative treatments

By Erin Mahoney, OT

With rising numbers of children being diagnosed with autism, along with the increased incidence and acceptance of sensory integration disorder, many medical professionals are asking what effective treatment options are available. Sensory integration is based on three basic senses: tactile, vestibular, and proprioceptive. The three senses are not only interconnected, but also connect with other systems in the brain. The complex interrelationship of these systems is crucial for our growth and development. Basically, they allow us to experience, interpret, and respond to different stimuli in our environment.

Individuals that present with difficulty integrating their senses and functioning in their environment have sensory integrative dysfunction. These individuals present with a decreased ability to interact with their environment. They often have hyper- or hyposensitivity to touch, movement, smell, sounds, and/or taste. Combinations of these abnormal sensitivities impact their developmental skills.

Therapeutic Listening involves specially modulated compact disks with specific frequencies filtered out. The patients listen to this “music” twice daily through special headphones which allow them to hear ambient sound and perform other task. A Therapeutic Listening program is set up by a specially trained occupational therapist and typically lasts 8- 12 weeks. This may be done in either the school or home settings. Auditory information from the specialized music provides input to both the vestibular and the auditory portions of the vestibular-cochlear continuum. Individuals who may benefit from this intervention include, but are not limited to, those with autism, sensory integration dysfunction, and learning difficulties.

Studies have shown that children who are involved in the Therapeutic Listening program in addition to a traditional sensory diet have better outcomes in standardized testing performance. Therapeutic Listening is an excellent and effective intervention for health care providers and parents, as it is manageable and affordable. Most importantly the results are astonishing. As with all other treatments for the human nervous system, results will be individualized. Neurodevelopmental improvements have been documented with this therapy modality. Increased self regulation, motor coordination, praxis, sleep wake patterns and sensory defensiveness are just a few of many outcomes that have been seen with this modality. Autistic patients tend to decrease hand flapping and self-stimulating behaviors after only one session of the Therapeutic Listening. Handwriting abilities and academic scores have also been noted to improve for individuals with specific learning disabilities. Therapeutic Listening is a novel intervention that is highly effective and becoming increasingly available; the end result is ultimately an improvement in numerous skills with extremely satisfied parents and providers.

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