

## Autism SA Services

- Diagnosis
- Training & Consultancy
- Early Development
- School Support
- Spectrum Advisory Services
- Community Services
- Autism Advisor Program
- Early Intervention Provider Panel
- Member of Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium

Thanks for reading 'Weighted Items'. The information within this booklet was collated from the series of 3 pamphlets developed by:

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# Weighted Items



Leading the way through knowledge, understanding and acceptance

Autism Association of South Australia Inc. trading as 'Autism SA'

## Before using weighted items ask yourself ...

- Why do I want to use them?
- Is a weighted item suitable for my situation and for this person?
- Are there behaviours present that may indicate weighted items may be useful?
- Which item would be most appropriate for the individual and the situation?
- Are there precautions to consider?
- Do I currently consult or have access to an occupational therapist (OT)?
- Am I going to consult an OT or other expert regarding use of weighted items?
- Am I aware of the recommended time and weight limits?
- How can I ensure that I adhere to the time and weight limits?
- If using with a child, is there an appropriate person to supervise the safe use of the item?
- Are there any other considerations, eg: aversions to particular textures or sounds?

## What are weighted items?

- They are objects (including vests, blankets, cushions, toys) that are filled with weights e.g. sand, rice or wheat
- They are items used by therapists to provide sustained deep pressure, which is believed to be calming

## Why use a weighted item?

It may help with:

- Improving alertness, focus and attention for activities
- Reducing aggressive or very physical play/behaviour for example, stomping feet, hitting or bumping others or rough-housing and wrestling
- Calming and decreasing anxiety
- Relaxing and going to sleep

## How does it help?

- Weight in the items provide the body with deep pressure, which provides calming input. When calm it is easier to process information and to learn.
- Weighted items are useful for people who experience difficulties with touch, body awareness, balance and movement senses

## Our Senses

### The 7 senses

- We generally learn about 5 senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch
- There are 2 other important senses: body awareness and movement
- These 'hidden' senses are critical in planning purposeful movement such as walking, running, hopping and jumping

### Body Awareness (Proprioception)

- Just as our eyes and ears send information to our brain about what we see and hear, our joints, muscles and ligaments sense our body position and send this information to our brain
- This sense lets us to know where our body parts are and what they are doing

### Movement (Vestibular)

- The inner ear provides information to the brain about balance, movement and gravity
- It lets us know how to position our head and body in relation to the earth and affects balance and the ability coordinate both sides of the body together

### Sensory Integration dysfunction (SI)

- People with SI dysfunction have difficulty organising and analysing sensory input. They may not respond appropriately to sensory input and exhibit 'unusual' behaviours in response to everyday experiences
- People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may experience difficulties with SI

## Precautions!

- The weighted item is not to be used as a restraint. The item should be able to be easily removed by the user.
- A minimum break of 60 minutes between applications relieves the stress that the weights place on muscles and bones. This is especially important for children, who are still developing.
- If weight and time limits are not followed, weights may cause fatigue and may have adverse effects on behaviour
- If skin irritations / reactions, shallow breathing, sweating, pale face, cold skin, nausea, vomiting or other signs of distress or discomfort are observed, immediately cease use of the weighted item and consult a relevant health professional.
- A weighted item should not be used if a person experiences or develops any of the following conditions:
  - Respiratory distress
  - Musculoskeletal problems
  - Chronic obstructive / respiratory disorders
  - Diabetes
  - Fragile skin, skin rash or open wounds
  - Problems with circulation
  - Pregnancy
  - Any other physical condition where application of weight or pressure is not advisable

# Types of Weighted Items

## Weighted blankets / quilts

- Commonly used to help people relax or sleep
- Distribution of the weights along the blanket may vary depending on what works best. Weights may be distributed:
  - Evenly throughout the blanket to provide pressure along the body, or
  - Along the edges of the blanket to hang over the side of the bed to provide lighter pressure over the body



## Weighted toys

- Will not look as obvious to other children and therefore more acceptable to some children.
- It may be possible to use a favourite stuffed toy, but it is essential to ensure appropriate filler and weight is used



## Weighted cushions

- Can be placed in the lap while sitting to help improve attention
- They are especially useful in school settings or while working at a desk
- They can be made at home from simple patterns
- They are small in size and can be transported easily



## Weighted shoulder wraps

- May be placed around the neck & shoulders to help calm, relax or improve attention
- May also be used as a lap cushion
- Fun shapes and patterns, such as snakes, cats and dogs can make them more appealing to children



## Weighted vests

- Provides weight to the whole body and is easier to keep in place during activities



## How do I use weighted items?

- Ensure weight and size of item is appropriate
- Use the most appropriate item for the situation and the individual
- Use as part of the daily routine, incorporating them into everyday activities

### Weight limits

- It is recommended that the weight limit is between 5 to 10% of the **individual's** body weight. As a guide:
  - Vests, cushions and toys are up to 5% of body weight
  - Blankets are up to 10% of body weight
- Use the minimum weight that is found to be effective

### Time limits

The recommended time limit is:

- Maximum of 20 minutes at a time, with a
- Minimum break of 60 minutes between applications

*Weight & time limits may vary subject to consultation with an occupational therapist*

### Maintenance

- Remove weights before washing item in cold water
- Before replacing weights, check they are intact and ensure the item is undamaged and has maintained its original shape

## What is deep pressure?

- Deep pressure is providing firm touch or pressure over and/or through the muscles and joints
- It is an important therapeutic tool used in intervention to decrease anxiety and over-stimulation - to help a person feel calm
- Deep pressure may be provided by using weighted items but they may not be appropriate for all people or suitable for every situation

### Other practical options for deep pressure....

- 'Heavy work' such as carrying groceries and pulling bags of toys
- Big, firm hugs
- Play using backpacks filled with weights, such as a small bag of rice
- Rolling a large therapy ball over back or legs
- Using large pillows and mats for burrowing
- Jumping / bouncing on trampolines
- Chewing toys / food / objects
- Firm massage
- Using a vibrating object (hand massager, toys)
- Deep pressure can be applied to: hands, arms, feet, legs or back
- Ensure that the weight or pressure is appropriate for the individual
- Always use caution and supervise when doing activities with children