

Weighted vests

Parents and therapists ask questions about whether or not a particular student may benefit from wearing a weighted vest during daily activities. Questions ensue regarding how the vest should be worn, how much weight should be added and where the weights should be placed in the vest. To date, the answers to these questions are primarily guided by anecdotal reports from practitioners who've tried the vests in various ways with a variety of students. Therapists are beginning to publish results of systematic studies that investigate whether or not the vest works, for whom and under what conditions.

There are two reports in the Occupational Therapy literature on the effectiveness of weighted vests, both published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. Each of these studies used different wearing schedules. In one, the author used weight that totaled as close to 5% of the child's weight as possible. In the other, one pound of weight was used for each of 4 children whose body weight ranged from 25.5 - 37 pounds. OTs should read each of these for a review of the protocol and procedures used, as well as results for the 9 children included in these studies. Then of course, should this strategy be chosen for a student, the occupational therapist needs to measure and document its impact in relation to the specific targeted performance. When the anticipated outcome isn't realized, the intervention strategy should be reconsidered.

Also, there are two other recent reports that summarize practice patterns via the results of an opinion survey sent to a random sample of OTs in the AOTA Sensory Integration Special Interest Section. The authors report therapists' procedures but this is not an investigation of the outcomes related to weighted vests as a strategy to support performance.

Fertel-Daly, D., Bedell, G. & Hinojosa, J. (2001). Effects of a weighted vest on attention to task and self-stimulatory behaviors in preschoolers with pervasive developmental disorders. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 55*, 629-640.

Olson, L. & Moulton, H. (2004). Use of weighted vests in pediatric occupational therapy practice. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics, 24*, 45-60.

Olson, L. & Moulton, H. (2004). Occupational therapists' reported experiences using weighted vests with children with specific developmental disorders. *Occupational Therapy International, 11*, 52-66.

VandenBerg, N. L. (2001). The use of a weighted vest to increase on-task behavior in children with attention difficulties. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 55*, 621-628.

Summarized by Mary Muhlenhaupt, OTR/L, FAOTA
July 2004
www.kidsot.com