Understanding the Link Between SPD and ADHD

by BRENDA VANTA

Sensory Processing Disorder

Independence Day means fireworks, BBQs and picnics with family and friends, making this holiday one of the most enjoyable day of the year for most of us. For children with ADHD, however, it can be a stressful time. Let's see why this happens and how to help your child feel better this July 4th.

Have You Heard about SPD?

SPD stands for Sensory Processing Disorder; a condition often associated with ADHD, yet either underdiagnosed or confused with ADHD (as it shares similar symptoms). The child with SPD will have difficulty processing and acting on information received from the five senses, very much like a "neurological traffic jam." The child will either be oversensitive or under sensitive to various stimuli from the taste or texture of a food to touch or loud noises. For example, fireworks could make a child with SPD extremely anxious, get fidgety, and trying to cover his ears because of the noise, wrinkle his nose because the smell is too strong, or close his eyes and cry because the light is too bright and uncomfortable.

SPD was first described by Jean Ayres, PhD, OT in the 1960s and had been more researched extensively in the 1990s. Usually symptoms improve with age as the child learns how to cope with the symptoms.

A person with ADHD, with or without SPD will need special attention. Based on which sense is more affected, try the following tips:

If the child is hyperactive and is sensory sensitive, ask him to carry some grocery bags, or help you with some household tasks (such as doing laundry or dusting).

If the child is sensitive to touch, let him use his fingers, draw on a piece of paper at the table while waiting for lunch, or finger paint the mirror in the bathroom with shaving cream.

If the child is sensitive to loud noises, he will likely be horrified by thunderstorms or fireworks. Keep him busy and ask him to make launder sounds than the thunder (or the fireworks). Or let him listen to some music on an iPod with large headphones.

If the child doesn't like the taste or texture of the food, try to puree the vegetables and add some spices, so the food will taste and feel differently. Give the child some healthy foods like raisins or dried fruits to teach him how to swallow his pills easily.

If the child has trouble with balance, take him to some swimming or horseback riding lessons. Any other sports will also help improve balance and posture as well.

Considerations

Getting the right diagnosis is very important. See a child psychologist, psychiatrist or occupational therapist. The earlier your child gets the diagnosis and starts the treatment with the psychologist, the better will be the outcome. In some cases, the healthcare professional may recommend special schools and programs to attend.