The following Protocol contains medical necessity criteria that apply for this service. It is applicable to Medicare Advantage products unless separate Medicare Advantage criteria are indicated. If the criteria are not met, reimbursement will be denied and the patient cannot be billed. Preauthorization is not required but is recommended if, despite this Protocol position, you feel this service is medically necessary; supporting documentation must be submitted to Utilization Management or behavioral health services vendor for medical or mental health indications respectively. Please note that payment for covered services is subject to eligibility and the limitations noted in the patient’s contract at the time the services are rendered.

Description

Sensory integration (SI) therapy has been proposed as a treatment of developmental disorders in patients with established dysfunction of sensory processing, e.g., children with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), brain injuries, fetal alcohol syndrome, and neurotransmitter disease. Sensory integration therapy may be offered by occupational and physical therapists who are certified in sensory integration therapy.

Background

The goal of sensory integration (SI) therapy is to improve the way the brain processes and adapts to sensory information, as opposed to teaching specific skills. Therapy usually involves activities that provide vestibular, proprioceptive, and tactile stimuli, which are selected to match specific sensory processing deficits of the child. For example, swings are commonly used to incorporate vestibular input, while trapeze bars and large foam pillows or mats may be used to stimulate somatosensory pathways of proprioception and deep touch. Tactile reception may be addressed through a variety of activities and surface textures involving light touch. A related method, auditory integration therapy, involves 10 hours of listening to electronically modified music over the course of 10 days.

Treatment sessions are usually delivered in a one-on-one setting by occupational therapists with special training from university curricula, clinical practice, and mentorship in the theory, techniques, and assessment tools unique to SI theory. Two organizations currently offer certification for SI therapy; Sensory Integration International (SII), a non-profit branch of the Ayres Clinic in Torrence, CA, and Western Psychological Services, a private organization that has a collaborative arrangement with University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles, to offer sensory integration training through USC’s Department of Occupational Science and Therapy. The sessions are often provided as part of a comprehensive occupational therapy or cognitive rehabilitation therapy and may last for more than one year.

Related Protocol

Cognitive Rehabilitation

Policy (Formerly Corporate Medical Guideline)

Sensory integration therapy is considered investigational.
Medicare Advantage

Sensory integration therapy may be medically necessary for persons with acquired sensory problems resulting from head trauma, or acute neurologic events including cerebrovascular accidents. It is not medically necessary for patients with chronic progressive brain conditions without potential for functional adaptation.

Services that are the subject of a clinical trial do not meet our Technology Assessment Protocol criteria and are considered investigational. For explanation of experimental and investigational, please refer to the Technology Assessment Protocol.

It is expected that only appropriate and medically necessary services will be rendered. We reserve the right to conduct prepayment and postpayment reviews to assess the medical appropriateness of the above-referenced procedures. Some of this Protocol may not pertain to the patients you provide care to, as it may relate to products that are not available in your geographic area.

References

We are not responsible for the continuing viability of web site addresses that may be listed in any references below.

1. Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association Technology Evaluation Center (TEC). Sensory integration therapy. TEC Assessment 1999; Volume 14, Tab 22.

