

Deep Pressure including Weighted Blankets and Animals

Summary: Deep pressure refers to the fact that many people find it soothing to experience the sensation of weight, such as being snuggled under a heavy blanket or weighted blanket. Deep pressure can be a powerful strategy to help people feel calmer.

What are Weighted Interventions?

Many people find it soothing to feel snug. Perhaps this dates back to being in the womb, where we were all snugly compressed inside the womb. And when babies are born, for centuries, people have been tightly swaddling their babies. As people grow older, many children, youth and even adults continue to enjoy:

- Hugs
- Massage
- Being underneath a heavy blanket
- Being underwater.

Interventions such as heavy blankets give us 'deep pressure', which act on the receptors in the skin, muscles and joints, and can help when:

- We are understimulated and need more stimulation., e.g. enjoying a nice massage.
- We are overwhelmed and need soothing stimulation, e.g. being upset and getting a hug, or cuddling under a blanket.



Even for pets, there are weighted vests marketed to help cats and dogs to stay calm during stressful times such as thunderstorms and fireworks.

Who Benefits from Deep Pressure?

While weighted blankets are calming for many people, they can be particularly helpful for children/youth such as those with sensory processing problems, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other neurodevelopmental conditions.

Ways to Provide Deep Pressure

- Weighted blankets
- Weighted animals
 - These are stuffed animals filled with plastic beads to give them weight, generally ranging from 1 lb, 2 lb and 5 lb weights.
 - Types of animals include frogs, snakes, lizards, dolphins.



(Images courtesy of www.fdm.ca)

- Weighted lap belts.
- Sleeping in a bag chair, in a pea/pod made from 2 body pillows sewn together
 - Examples
 - Sumo bean bag chair
- "Air lounge"
- Body sock

Weighted Blankets

A weighted blanket is a special blanket that has weight in it so that it feels heavy.

In the beginning, weighted blankets were mainly recommended by occupational therapists (OTs), specifically for children with special needs.

However, weighted blankets are now so popular, that many online and physical retail stores sell them.

And they are marketed towards adults as well, such as those with anxiety, but also just adults in general.

How long does it work?

It may take 15 minutes before the effects become apparent. The effect peaks after 15 minutes. The blanket should be removed after 20-30 minutes. If used at nighttime to help a child fall asleep, it should not be kept on all night.

How to Use a Weighted Blanket

Do's

- Do obtain advice from a health professional such as an occupational therapist.
- Do ensure that you use an appropriately weighted blanket. How heavy? The recommended weight of a weighted blanket depends on the child's physique, and is generally up to 10% of body weight. The weight is recommended by the occupational therapist.
- Do get a blanket less than 10% of the child's weight. Is the child less than 50 lbs? If so, note that there have been deaths reported from younger children being suffocated.
- Do ensure that you can see the child's head to check that the child is alive and breathing.
- Do ensure that the child consents (i.e. agrees) to having a weighted intervention, even if it is not verbal.

Don'ts

- Don't use the blanket to restrain or confine a child.
- Don't cover the child's head with the blanket, in order to ensure that the child does not suffocate.
- Don't roll the child in a blanket, unless there is a therapist supervising right beside the child.
- Don't leave a child unsupervised with a weighted blanket.

Warnings and Caution with Weighted Blankets

Note the following

- Does the person have a medical condition such as respiratory disorder, cardiac disorder, epilepsy, low muscle tone, skin disorders or circulatory disorders? If so, speak to a medical professional prior to using a weighted blanket.
- Weighted blankets are NOT a restraint device. The person must be able to remove it at all.
- The blanket is not to be used as a punishment; nor is it to be used as a reward.
- Always ensure a child is supervised while using a blanket.
- The head and neck must be free and visible at all times.
- The blanket size and weight must match the person. For children, 10% of the bodyweight is usually recommended.
- In general, a blanket is used for up to 20-min. at a time.
- The person must be able to give consent before using a weighted blanket.

Taking Care of the Weighted Blanket

Standard weighted blankets have removable covers that are machine washable (cold water only) and should be cleaned on a regular basis.

How to Make Your Own

Consider making your own. Do a Google search for instructions on making a weighted blanket.

Where to Find a Weighted Blanket

- **Buy a used blanket.** Many parents purchase weighted blankets for their child but no longer require them when their children are older. Consider contacting parent support groups for children with autism.
- **Buy from online retailers**

Where to Find Weighted Blankets, Animals and Related Products

One can find weighted blankets and animals in many places nowadays:

- FDMT | www.fdmt.ca, 1-866-465-0559

- South Paw | www.southpawenterprises.com, 1-800-228-1698
- Sensory Solutions | <http://www.schoolspecialty.ca/sensorysolutions.jsp>, 1-800-775-7966
- Amazon.com or Amazon.ca
- Bed Bath and Beyond

About Weighted blankets

- When buying a weighted blanket, it is highly recommended to buy not just a weighted blanket, but a washable cover for it as well. Most of the time, when you buy a blanket, the option is built-in.
- For a child-sized blanket, typical costs are \$70 and up.
- For an adult-sized blanket, typical costs are \$200 and up.

About this Article

Written by Marjorie Anderson (OT); Kim Prud'Homme (OT); Jennifer Boggett (OT); Michael Cheng, Child Psychiatrist.

Disclaimer

The content of this document is for general information and education only. The accuracy, completeness, adequacy, or currency of the content is not warranted or guaranteed. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Users should always seek the advice of physicians or other qualified health providers with any questions regarding a health condition. Any procedure or practice described here should be applied by a health professional under appropriate supervision in accordance with professional standards of care used with regard to the unique circumstances that apply in each practice situation. The authors disclaim any liability, loss, injury, or damage incurred as a consequence, directly or indirectly, or the use and application of any of the contents of this document.

Creative Content License

This work is "licensed" under a Creative Commons License (Attribution-Non Commercial-Sharelike 2.0, <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>) which means that you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work, and make derivative works as long as you give the original author credit, the work is not used for commercial purposes, and if you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.