WHAT’S THE EVIDENCE?

AUDIO INTEGRATION THERAPIES

Auditory integration therapies (AIT), including the Tomatis Method, are sound therapies, developed as techniques for improving abnormal sound sensitivity in individuals with behavioural disorders, including Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

What were we asked?
A parent queried what the evidence was for Tomatis treatment, and whether it was simply a calming therapy or had some medical benefits. Tomatis is a specific type of sound therapy used with children with ADHD, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Learning Difficulties (LD).

What did we do?
In 2011 we searched the Cochrane Library, TRIP database, PubMed, NHS Evidence and guidance issued by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). In June 2012, we searched these databases again to update this report.

We asked an academic speech and language therapist, as well as contacting The Listening Centre which is the UK centre for ‘listening therapy’, providing therapy based on the Tomatis method. We asked about their programme, and whether there was evidence to support the improvements that they claim; we also asked the cost and time required for assessment and therapy.

What did we find?
The Tomatis Method is a complementary or alternative treatment which is only provided privately. The treatment is a form of ‘auditory integration therapy’ and involves listening to music (typically Mozart) modulated using a special device, and following a prescribed programme over several months. Other similar programmes include Berard system and Johansen sound therapies. Providers do not intend the treatment as a calming therapy and claim an impressive range of functional benefits, particularly communication skills, for children with a variety of conditions.

The Listening Centre recommends an initial treatment regime of approximately 16 weeks, involving 3 treatment periods using the ‘Electronic Ear’, interspersed with 2 break periods. Parents are asked to pay £60 for an initial consultation, after which they can decide whether to take up the treatment. The initial treatment regime costs £1345, which includes the first consultation fee. The Electronic Ear is not available for parents to buy, so all treatment takes place at the Listening Centre, which will in most cases mean that parents also need to pay for accommodation costs. Children can return to the Listening Centre for further treatments, usually once a year, which would be 7 days in length and costs £295. Children are assessed at the end of treatment periods with a listening test, and a copy of this report can be provided.

Auditory integration therapy (AIT) for children with autism was the subject of a Cochrane Review published in 2004, and revised in 2007 and 2011¹. Several published research studies did not meet the strict criteria for being considered scientifically reliable. The results of the studies they did include did not show any conclusive effectiveness (functional benefits) from the AIT treatment. A

Note: the views expressed here are those of the Cerebra Research Unit at the Peninsula Medical School and do not represent the views of the Cerebra charity, or any other parties mentioned. We strongly recommend seeking medical advice before undertaking any treatments/therapies not prescribed within the NHS.

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A statement by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association states that AIT has not met scientific standards for efficacy that would justify its practice by audiologists and speech-language pathologists. A clinical trial of Tomatis treatment was published in 2008; this too was inconclusive with children receiving placebo (sham) treatment making similar progress to those receiving Tomatis therapy.

Currently, there is no high quality evidence of improvement in children’s functioning or communication over what would be expected with typical development over time.

**Our recommendations:**
In the absence of any substantive evidence of benefit, and the cost and considerable amount of time required, leads us to not recommend using this treatment. However, we would be prepared to reconsider our view in the light of any new high quality research to support claims of effectiveness.

**Further information**
We have provided a link to this organisation for reference only; as can be seen from our comments, in no way do we endorse the products offered by this organisation.
[www.listeningcentre.co.uk](http://www.listeningcentre.co.uk)

We would like to hear your feedback on this summary – please email us at pencru@pcmd.ac.uk if you have any comments.

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References:

