

Use of Weighted Blankets

What is the purpose of weighted blankets?

Weighted blankets are a sensory based intervention designed to support an individual with their regulation. They are often recommended to individuals who have sensory processing difficulties or those who “seek” a specific type of sensory input. Some evidence suggests that benefits associated with weighted blankets are improved sleep (Baric et al 2023), reduced levels of anxiety (Eron et al 2020 and Becklund et al 2021) and increased activity levels during the daytime (Ekholm et al 2020).

What are the associated risks?

The evidence base shows mixed results for the effectiveness of weighted blankets (RCOT 2023) and highlights the following risks of implementing them:

- Suffocation: In 2008 a child died of suffocation after being rolled in a weighted blanket and left unsupervised for 20 minutes (OEQ 2008). More recently in 2022, 2 children reportedly died after getting trapped inside a “pillow fort weighted blanket” from Target USA (Dodds 2022).
- Further complications/risks to pre-existing health conditions such as “cardiac problems, epilepsy, serious hypotonia, skin problems (including certain allergies), and circulatory problems.” (pg 2-3 RCOT 2019)
- Distress to the individual if they are unable to remove themselves from a weighted blanket.

Can the ICPS Occupational Therapists assess my child for a weighted blanket?

For an Occupational Therapist to administer a weighted blanket they must clinically reason and document it’s use, and carry out an appropriate assessment, risk assessment, and ongoing review (RCOT 2019 and RCOT 2023). The school age sensory team are a short-term intervention service and therefore we do not provide an assessment for weighted blankets as part of our service offer.

We may recommend the use of weighted equipment (e.g. lap pads, neck wraps and shoulder “snakes”) as these require a different risk assessment. If these are recommended, they will be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

What should I consider before using a weighted blanket?

If you choose to independently invest in a weighted blanket for yourself/a person in your care, please note this is under your own assessment of the risks. Please be mindful to consider the following factors when purchasing and using a weighted blanket:

- Weight of the blanket: Ideally it should be as light as possible and must be no more than 10% of the person's weight (OEQ 2008)
- Supervision: the person under the blanket should be supervised.
- Size of blanket: Ensure it does not hang over the sides of the bed and that the head and neck are not covered.
- Material of the blanket: Be mindful of the person's allergies and what their preferences are.
- When it is used/duration of use: guidance suggests it should be used for a maximum of 20 minutes and therefore not recommended for use at night. For further use of weighted blankets at night/for sleeping see RCOT (2019).
- Positioning: the person must not be rolled up in the blanket and must be able to move freely underneath it.
- Removal: can they easily and independently remove the blanket from their body?
- Health considerations: are there preexisting health conditions whereby adding weight to their body could increase risk of or cause harm?
- Working collaboratively with the weighted blanket user: what are their thoughts and feelings of using a weighted blanket? Do they understand the risks? Are they able to communicate their wish to use/remove the blanket?

It is important to note that the risks/implications of a weighted blanket should be regularly reviewed with them to ensure it is still appropriate to use.

These recommendations were written in accordance with guidance from The Royal college of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) 2019 and 2023. For full guidance please see these documents (referenced below).

References:

- Bolic Baric, V., Skuthälla, S., Pettersson, M., Gustafsson, P.A. and Kjellberg, A., 2023. The effectiveness of weighted blankets on sleep and everyday activities—A retrospective follow-up study of children and adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 30(8), pp.1357-1367.
- Becklund, A.L., Rapp-McCall, L. and Nudo, J., 2021. Using weighted blankets in an inpatient mental health hospital to decrease anxiety. *Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 19(2), pp.129-134.

- Dodds, I. (2022). *Target urgently recalls weighted blankets for children after two girls suffocate to death*. [online] The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/target-weighted-blankets-children-deaths-b2250846.html> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2024]
- Ekholm, B., Spulber, S. and Adler, M., 2020. A randomized controlled study of weighted chain blankets for insomnia in psychiatric disorders. *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 16(9), pp.1567-1577.
- Eron, K., Kohnert, L., Watters, A., Logan, C., Weisner-Rose, M. and Mehler, P.S., 2020. Weighted blanket use: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(2), pp.7402205010p1-7402205010p14.
- Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec (2008) OEQ Position Statement on the use of Weighted Blankets. Montreal: OEQ.
- RCOT (2019 updated) Briefing. Safe use of Weighted Blankets (for Children and Adults) available at: [Safe Use of Weighted Blankets \(for children and adults\) Briefing \(Feb 2019\) 0.pdf](#)
- RCOT (2023) Weighted blankets for children and adults A guide for occupational therapists. Available at: [RCOT launches official weighted blankets guide for occupational therapists - RCOT](#)