

Autism

by author Irene Karatzas, ND



Autism is a condition that we often hear about, but unless you know someone affected by this disorder, you may not know much about it.

Autism, properly referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurological condition resulting in developmental disability that affects

- communication skills
- social interaction
- behaviour, activities, and interests.

ASD is the most common neurological disorder affecting children and one of the most common developmental disabilities affecting Canadians. Autism, once considered a rare disorder, has increased dramatically in recent years—about one in 200 children in Canada has ASD. In the past six years, there has been a 150 percent increase in the number of reported cases.

ASD changes the way the brain processes information and can affect all aspects of a person's development. Classic autism usually appears during the first three years of life and is four times more common in boys than girls.

What Causes Autism?

No one knows what causes ASD, but some researchers believe that mercury, a known neurotoxin, is related to the rise in the rate of autism. A 2006 study of the relationship between environmentally released mercury and autism rates in Texas concluded that for each 1,000 lb (453.5 kg) of environmentally released mercury, there was a 61 percent increase in the rate of autism.

Sources of mercury include thimerosal, a preservative used in vaccinations; deep-sea fish, including tuna; and air emissions from activities such as burning coal, cement plants, and gasoline combustion.

Dietary Causes Children with ASD often have gastrointestinal abnormalities such as poor digestion, increased intestinal permeability, and changes in bowel flora. In addition, immune dysfunction is commonly seen in children with ASD, leading to environmental allergies and a heightened sensitivity to foods.

A comprehensive protocol based on individual test results may be recommended by a naturopathic doctor. Typical suggestions from clinical experience may include a hypoallergenic diet, protein supplementation (whey or rice), multivitamin/mineral formula, probiotics, and fish oil for essential fatty acid content. **Dietary Recommendations for ASD**

- Eliminate casein (dairy) and wheat from diet.
- Reduce simple carbohydrates and balance blood sugar levels by consuming low glycemic index (GI) foods with protein (see alive.com/1768a5a2.php for a list of low GI foods).
- Increase intake of hemp, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and walnuts.
- Sprinkle 1 to 2 Tbsp (15 to 30 mL) of ground flax and sesame seeds over food each day.
- Eliminate tartrazine (otherwise known as E102 or FD&C Yellow 5), a synthetic dye used as a food colouring in many convenience foods and soft drinks.
- Eliminate artificial sweeteners such as aspartame and sucralose

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