

The Body, the Brain, the Connection

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The idea of healing from within is not new.

It is devastating, confusing and scary when your child receives a diagnosis of autism. As a parent, you want what's best for your child so you embark on a search for answers, and probably find yourself surrounded instead by questions: "What therapy should we be trying next? ABA? DIR? Should we put our child on an anti-viral or anti-fungal drug? Will homeopathy work? What about hyperbaric oxygen or chelation or rapid prompting?" Unlike in years past, today many choices are available for helping children with autism spectrum disorders, from evidence-based to experimental. Most require a significant amount of money, which results in its own set of questions: "How can we afford this? Will the expense be worth it? Will this intervention work for my child or wind up being thousands of dollars spent in vain?"

Autism is a development disability and by definition, impacts your child's brain, speech/communication, behavior and his ability to engage socially with others. It seems quite logical that parents turn to therapies that address these issues. But there's more to ASD than meets the eye and we are beginning to realize the connection between a child's state of inner wellness and his outer manifestations of the condition. The good news is that one of your most important tools for wellness is right in your own kitchen – food. What's food got to do with ASD? Plenty.

Changing a child's diet is gaining momentum within the autism community as an important step to healing, but it is not always a welcomed approach. First, many people know little about the significant impact the food we eat has on cognition, growth, learning, and behaviors. It's an "unknown," it's an "alternative health" approach – not everyone's cup of tea. Second,

most of us are emotionally comfortable with the foods we are eating now. Today's "ready to go" foods are quick and easy to prepare, and require few cooking skills. Adopting a new way of eating comes with a learning curve...who has time for that? And many children are strong willed and often simply will not cooperate with a new eating plan. A change in diet may seem impossible right from the start, so why even try?

I'll tell you why: because healing from within can bring about a systemic change in your child, one which can complement and support all the other therapies and strategies you use. Think of it this way: when your child has a bad cold, the flu or a severe digestive ailment, on a physical level he's just not "able" to attend and learn. All his body energy is engaged in fighting his physical problems. That's the way it is for many kids with ASD. Their body systems are weak or "sick" and until they are supported back onto a path toward wellness, any "outside" therapy program will be compromised.

Foods can either help build a foundation for wellness or sabotage your efforts. What is happening inside your child – especially within his digestive tract – is affecting his brain, his attention span and focus, and his ability to cooperate with you. Change the food your child eats and you'll soon see that the right diet will create a "foundation for wellness" so that all other therapies work better.

Food is Medicine

Foods and herbs contain the protein, fats, minerals, water, fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, enzymes and many other nutrients that are essential for life. These nutrients create *energy* for cells to regenerate and push out or eliminate many dangerous toxins, including heavy metals and environmental chemicals.

Doctors and pediatricians who specialize in ASD often recommend a gluten-free, casein-free diet as an important and necessary first step towards inner and outer wellness. Many parents who try a GFCF diet report some level of improvement right away. Others don't find it to be effective, often because adherence to the diet can be difficult, if not impossible, within their family. Today's standard American diet is based mostly on gluten and casein. For some families, removing these food staples leaves little else of interest to eat. The diet is abandoned too soon to know if real healing might occur in the child.

Healing the Gut Helps the Mind

"Disease begins in the intestines" – so goes an old saying about health and wellness. The exciting news is that it is equally true that healing begins there as well!

The idea of healing from within is not new. For thousands of years millions of habitants in all regions of the world – including the Far East, India, Eastern Europe, South America, North America and Africa – have used traditional foods and herbs to promote and maintain health. Ancient healers actually *prescribed* specific foods and herbs, along with cleansing therapies (enemas, nasal lavage, sweating), acupuncture and massage to recreate wellness when someone became ill. Traditional Chinese Medicine (China) and Ayurvedic medicine (India) are based on these principles, which affirm the intimate relationship between human beings and their environment,

including the foods they eat (or don't eat).

So let's say these ideas make sense to you and you're intrigued about the connection between the gut and the brain, and healing from within. You may already be implementing some dietary changes with your child: removing artificial dyes and preservatives, reducing or eliminating gluten and/or dairy by following a special diet such as GFCE, SPD (Specific Carbohydrate Diet) or another similar approach. That's a positive step! Many children with ASD also suffer from various infections like yeast and viral infections, so it is of vital importance to eliminate sugar as well. We've known since 1973 that sugar can actually decrease an individual's immune defenses for up to a whopping five hours! Sugar creates an inflammatory response in our body, forces our glucose levels to shoot up and feeds pathogens in our gut. The elevated glucose makes the blood acidic and encourages the growth of systemic (in the blood stream) infections like yeast and viruses.

In future articles of this Healing from Within column, we will give you the information and tools to start your child onto a path of wellness. We'll help you better understand how the two brains in our body – the one in our head and the brain in our gut – are related. Based on our many years of experience with diet and wellness, we'll share strategies and take-home advice in a way that is simple and logical.

We'll start in our next column with The Principle of Step-by-Step. Step-by-Step tells us where to begin and what steps to

take first. And, four simple actions can point you in the direction of healing:

1. Create energy. Did you know it's very difficult to heal if your body doesn't have energy?
2. Correct digestion. Without proper digestion, your body cannot absorb important nutrients for healing.
3. Conquer any infections in your child's body. With autism, a number of infections are often present and must be overcome: fungal, viral, gut, tooth, urinary, etc.
4. Cleanse out the toxins. There are two types of toxins: exogenous – those produced outside the body, and endogenous – those produced from within by a body that is inflamed, infected and out of balance. There is a great deal of focus today on exogenous or environmental toxins and not enough understanding and focus on the endogenous toxins.

Anytime you start something new, it can feel overwhelming, especially when you want the best for your child as quickly as possible. However, you'll do yourself and your child a favor by taking things step by step and at a pace that feels comfortable for you. Small steps over time add up to big results! ■

Reference

Sanches, Albert, et.al. (1973). "Role of sugars in human neutrophilic phagocytosis." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 26, 1180-1184.