



Autism is a condition of the nervous system that affects sensory processing, cognition (thinking), emotion, movement, and the ability to relate to others. In other words, it effects the entire brain.

Western medicine calls this condition "Autism Spectrum Disorder" ("ASD") because kids (and adults) show different degrees of these characteristics. In "Asperger's Syndrome", the child can function fairly well and can be highly successful as they often become experts in their very restricted area(s) of interest. Autistic savants (previously called "idiot savants") are usually not functional but have extra-ordinary gifts that cause us to question our notions of intelligence, talent and creativity¹.

Most holistic practitioners consider other brain conditions such as Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), childhood seizure disorders, behavioral disorders, and other "random" conditions to be variations or "on the spectrum" with autism. Most of these brain dysfunctions do not go away with time, though with brain maturation by age 25, the child can learn to compensate for some of these weaknesses and to utilize their unique talents. For the purposes of this article, all these brain conditions will be collectively called ASD.

Scary Facts

ASD is on the rise. The formal statistic used to be 1 in 150 births, it has now increased to 1 out of 91 births, and 1 out of 50 male births².

Some say that this increase is due to better reporting; however, most practitioners agree that, if anything, it is still under-reported. If one includes other brain dysfunctions, such as ADHD in the statistics, it is probably as much as 1 out of 5 of our kids who have dysfunctional brains.

ASD is not a "disease" because there is no one known cause. Recent research demonstrates a genetic tendency. However, only 20% of illness is determined by genes; the rest by environmental factors and the lives of our parents and grandparents, passed on by epigenes³. In addition, the dramatic rise over a very short period of time cannot be explained by genes; therefore environmental factors are certainly dominant. There is no question that the amount of chemicals in our mothers, fetuses and children has increased over the past few decades⁴.

The Vaccine Connection

There is much mis-information and mis-perception about the relationship between ASD and vaccines. However, the facts are simple: some kids clearly developed ASD shortly after receiving vaccination; most kids with ASD do not have as clear an association. The implications of these facts are also simple: while single vaccines are "safe" for the majority of kids (and adults), for some a single or multiple vaccination can be devastating.

In some ways, this is similar to most pharmaceuticals--that they are safe for the majority of the population, but can be devastating for a small minority. It comes down to risk-benefit ratio--if the risk is small and the benefit huge then it is worth taking that risk. On a population basis, the

benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks. However, on an individual basis, this is not always true.

Also, vaccines are different than drugs in that they are designed to have persistence in the body. It is their persistence and additive effects that in some kids cause the problem. The combination of vaccines into DPT and MMR, for the convenience of the parent and physician, increases the toxic load and challenge to the immune system when compared to giving each vaccine separately. In some kids, it seems to be the preservatives (mercury) and other things added to the vaccine (called adjuvants⁵), that instigate or exacerbate brain dysfunction; in other kids it is the viral material (such as the weakened measles virus) that causes the immune system to go haywire.

Fifty years ago, kids received only a few vaccines--smallpox, measles and DPT. Then polio vaccine was developed. However, nowadays, kids are receiving over 20 vaccinations by the age of 5, a critical time in the development of their immune system and brain. It is now formally recommended that kids receive their first vaccination for hepatitis B within the first 24 hours of life!⁶

There are ways to reasonably negotiate these issues that will be discussed below.

A Myriad of Other Factors

In the diagnosis of ASD, there are two main categories: congenital (at birth) and acquired. In the congenital form, the child's nervous system seems to have been dysfunctional since birth. In the acquired form, the child develops normally until a certain event occurs, after which there is a sudden or gradual deterioration of neurological functioning.

Reaction to MMR when it does occur is dramatic in that when given at 15 months, the child is already walking and talking, so a loss of speech or coordination is apparent. Neurological reactions at other times are not as apparent and often difficult to measure.

Sometimes these changes can only be perceived by a parent, but difficult to observe by a clinician, hence the loss of trust and a desperate and understandably "crazy" parent.

Despite the misperceptions, hype and denial in the popular media, experts in ASD agree that it is a multi-factorial condition⁷. ASD and other brain dysfunctions are web-like, not being "caused" by a single factor or event, but usually manifesting when "the last straw" occurs. This manifestation can occur months or years after a dysfunctional process has begun. For example, Vitamin D, B12, iron and magnesium deficiencies, present in up to 90% of the world's children and adults, can make the brain and immune systems vulnerable to the toxic effects of vaccines, pesticides, preservatives and other challenges.

Many kids with ASD note significant improvement with change of diet. Foods not only provide nutrients and energy, they also program our genes and biochemistry. Foods of today are not what they were 50 years ago. Specific foods, especially dairy, wheat, soy and corn, are genetically modified, over-farmed, over processed, and over-utilized and can be a significant contributor to illness

through allergenicity, pesticides and other factors.

And so, like the growing list of chronic dysfunctions of many of our bodily systems, including diabetes, depression, sleep disorder, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, thyroid disease and Alzheimer's disease, ASD in children and adults are a "spectrum" of disorders that affect the brain and are "caused" by a spectrum of factors that include nature and nurture.

What to Do

These issues are so important that every parent, every potential parent, every grandparent, every educator, every politician, and every person who wants to develop and preserve optimal brain function, should invest time and energy on this topic. Specific steps to consider:

- 1) Read read read. Learn learn learn. Don't accept what "they" say, good or bad. Read and learn enough to feel confident in your conclusions. There is lots of bad information out there. There is also lots of good information.
- 2) Commit. To a lifestyle that saves our children. As we know, the earth is at a critical juncture. So are our children. For the first time in hundreds of years, this generation of children will be sicker and live a poorer life than their parents.
- 3) Consider a change of food plan (not "diet"). Move away from animal, dairy, wheat and soy based foods to a more "green" diet with lots of organic brightly colored vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds and beans.
- 4) Regarding vaccines, the decision is highly personal--it is not "one size fits all". Factors to consider include: a) how potentially disabling is the disease and it's treatment; b) timing of the vaccination (the immune system is considered immature until age 5-6, exposure to the disease may not occur until after this age, allowing for a reasonable delay), c) if the vaccine is given individually or in combination with others, d) adjuvants and toxins known to be in the vaccine (i.e. multi-dose vials of flu and other vaccines still are preserved with thimerisol, a form of mercury).
- 5) Consider testing for toxicity (especially heavy metals), and deficiencies, that can affect the health of your family. If planning pregnancy, try to get tested at least a year before conception, to allow for the correction of any imbalances and to clean up the diet. Removal of dairy, wheat and soy before and during pregnancy and breast feeding can have a significant affect on your child's entire life⁸.
- 6) There are many tests and interventions that can significantly help a child to recover from ASD. These include special biochemical tests, diets, supplements, acupuncture, yoga, ayurveda, biofeedback, and many others. Work with an experienced practitioner.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This educational material may not be used to make decisions about medical care without the oversight of an experienced practitioner.

Footnotes (see reading list for more information)

¹ see future article on energy field medicine.

² <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/autism/peds2009-1522v1.pdf>

³ Epigenes are molecules that affect how genes are expressed, and unlike genes, which are stable from generation to generation, are affected by our lifestyle, and have been shown scientifically to affect at least the two generations that follow.

⁴ see www.ewg.org, environmental work group to learn more about toxins in foods and the environment

⁵ adjuvants are chemicals, such as aluminum, that increase reactivity of the vaccine to stimulate the immune system to develop the protective antibodies that are the basis of immunization.

⁶ for the complete schedule of recommended vaccines, see: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/downloads/child/2009/09_0-6yrs_schedule_pr.pdf

⁷ Baker, Sidney: Autism: Effective Biomedical Treatments (Have We Done Everything We Can For This Child? Individuality In An Epidemic), 2nd Ed. ARI, 2005. ISBN 0974-036-099.

⁸ Fuhrman MD, Joel: Disease-Proof Your Child: Feeding Kids Right. St Martins, 2006. ISBN 0312-338-082

For More Information (Books followed by ISBN number)

- See Dr. Cheikin's website, www.cheikin.com, for related articles on: Heavy Metal Toxicity, Optimal Pregnancy, FrankenFoods as well as other topics and holistic health information.
- Dr. Cheikin offers workshops in several holistic health topics for adults and children. Please call for more information or to host a Workshop.
- www.autism.org has quality information and books on the topic
- McCandless, Jaquelyn: Children with Starving Brains: A Medical Treatment Guide for Autism Spectrum Disorder, 4th Ed. Bramble, 2009. 1883-647-177.
- Doman, Glenn: What to Do About Your Brain Injured Child... Square One, 2005. ISBN-10: 0757-001-866.
- Sears, Robert: The Vaccine Book: Making the Right Decision for Your Child. Little, Brown, 2007. ISBN-10: 0316-017-507
- Pollan, Michael (2006). The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals. New York: Penguin Press. ISBN 9781-5942-00823.
- Campbell, TC et al: China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Implications for Diet, Weight Loss... Benbella, 2005. 1932-100-385.
- Fenster, Carol: Special Diet Solutions: Healthy Cooking Without Wheat, Gluten, ... or Refined Sugar, 3rd Ed. Savory Palate, 2001. 1889-374-008 (out of print but very helpful book, others also good).
- Boutenko Victoria: Green for Life. Raw Family, 2005. 0970-481-969.
- Peck, M. Scott: Road Less Traveled. New York: Touchstone, 1978 (1997). 0684-847-248.
- Sivananda Center: The Sivananda Companion to Yoga. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983. 0684-870-002.

The contents of this article are copyright 2009 by Michael Cheikin MD and may not be reproduced without express written permission.

Michael Cheikin MD is a holistic physician, Board Certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation ("Physiatry"), Pain Management, Spinal Cord Medicine and Electrodiagnostic Medicine and licensed in Medical Acupuncture. He provides leadership to several medical institutions. Dr. Cheikin has extensively studied yoga, diet and metabolism, Ayurvedic, Chinese and energy medicine and other alternative modalities for over 30 years. He designs balanced, natural, individualized health programs for his patients utilizing a combination of education and counseling, medical yoga, whole foods and supplements, and medical acupuncture. He also uses special laboratory tests and diet plans for his patients with obscure, chronic and severe problems who have not responded satisfactorily to other methods of healing. He accepts most insurance plans for consultation by adults and children. 610-239-8626 or www.cheikin.com