

Autism

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<http://www.osteopathiccenter.org/autism.html>

Autism in children is an important subject of current study. It is often in the news as scientists and medical researchers discuss their work hoping to find its source. Osteopathy can provide enormous help in understanding and dealing with this disorder in children. This article is provided to give an osteopathic perspective to parents about the causes of autism and treatment possibilities for their autistic children.

Statistics indicate that the number of reported cases of autism is increasing in the United States. In the past 10 years, according to the California Department of Developmental Services (CDDS), there was a nearly 1000% increase in cases. Last year the department reported a 31% increase from 2001 to 2002. In the last 12 months the CDDS reported nearly 3,577 new cases of severe autism in California. Worldwide statistics show similar increases.

The Problem:

Mainstream medicine offers few, if any, solutions for autistic children or their families. Many medical practitioners still consider it a psychiatric disorder, a form of mental illness caused by cold, uncaring parents whom they term "refrigerator mothers." In the past they believed it was a type of infantile schizophrenia and treated these children with shock therapy, isolation, and extremely potent antipsychotic medications such as Respirodol and Prozac. These forms of treatments sedate the patient without treating the underlying problems.

Major medical universities spend millions of dollars each year looking for genetic causes of autism but there is much data suggesting environmental causes. Certainly, autism may have a genetic component; however, the sharp rise in the number of cases suggests that genetic factors are not the sole or even major cause of this condition. In genetic diseases, the number of cases stays constant from year to year with only minor variations. With a 1000% increase in 10 years or a 32% increase in cases over one year, the evidence for genetics as a primary cause of autism is weak.

What then may cause autism?

Xenobiotics are foreign substances found in the natural environment. They include: Polychlorinated Biphenels (PCB's), pesticides, insecticides, sodium lauryl sulfate, and heavy metals. They are found everywhere from Antarctica to the pristine lakes of the Swiss Alps, where residents have the highest PCB levels in the world (as well as one of the highest autism rates). Xenobiotics are found in our water supply and in the human body. They enter the body through food, soaps, and, in some cases, vaccines.

Nearly 80% of xenobiotics are untested for their carcinogenicity or their potential for damage to the human nervous system, yet they are prevalent in our society. For example, sodium lauryl is found in many children's shampoos, soaps, and toothpastes. Xenobiotics are known carcinogens and possible neurotoxins. Recent studies at the University of Georgia Medical College show that it is absorbed in the brain, heart and liver. However, more research is needed to determine the effects of other xenobiotics. Heavy metals such as cadmium, arsenic, aluminum, and mercury, common in the environment, can have severe effects on young nervous systems.

Mercury and Aluminum

One potential problem is the mercury and aluminum contained in childhood immunizations. In 2001 the law firm of Waters & Kraus acquired a confidential report authored by the Centers for Disease Control. The CDC scientists investigated autism as a potential neurological injury caused by mercury in childhood vaccines.

The confidential study demonstrated that an exposure to more than 62.5 micro grams of mercury within the first three months of life significantly increases a child's risk of developing autism. Children with the exposure were more than twice as likely to develop autism as children not exposed.

Today many children receive 187 mcg of mercury in the first 6 months of life. When Congress investigated mercury levels in vaccines in 1998, they found the cumulative mercury dose was nearly 18 times the level considered safe by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA's safe level was determined by studies of children of the Faeroes Islands whose mothers were eating mercury-tainted meat. The Faeroes children's' blood averaged four times the EPA's daily "safe" dose (0.1 micrograms per kilogram) and exhibited measurable neurological deficits seven years later. American children were receiving four times that dose by the age of six months.

Aluminum, which is a known neurological toxin, is also found at high levels in vaccines, making it another component in possible vaccine toxicity. Since January 2005, California requires all vaccines to be

thiomonosol free, whenever possible. Some vaccines, such as the flu vaccine are impossible to make without mercury.

Birth Trauma

A second biological contributor to autism is the great increase in caesarian section deliveries and birth complications. Autistic children are 12 times more likely to suffer birth trauma or complication than their non-autistic siblings. A British study reported on high rates of autism in one specific hospital near London. This hospital had an autism birth rate 21 times higher than that of neighboring hospitals. It was the policy of this hospital to schedule all mothers for elective C-sections one week prior to their due dates. A baby who had no evidence of trauma to their bony structure as determined by osteopathic evaluation, were those who had an easy delivery without stimulation of labor in the beginning, or mechanical intervention during its course.

Other kinds of birth trauma can also be contributing factors. Studies done by Viola Frymann, DO and the Osteopathic Center for Children & Families in San Diego, have demonstrated that children with compression to the delicate bones that make up the infant skull can result in neurological dysfunction. As the baby descends into the mother's pelvis during birth, the pubic bone can exert pressure on the presenting part of the skull. If these forces exceed the limit of the tissue, the tissue may be strained. Instrumentation such as forceps or vacuum extraction can further put the baby at risk for cranial bone dysfunction. It is indeed recognized however that such instrumentation may be a life-saving measure when certain problems are present. If these babies can be evaluated and treated by an osteopath as soon after birth as possible, the long term effects will be minimized. Many times forceps are used to achieve a live baby when problems with labor exist. Yes, even well applied forceps or suction may be somewhat traumatic, but they may nevertheless be life saving.

Research has found that these strains can alter the soft tissue underneath which can change blood flow patterns to the brain itself. These changes have been correlated with increased risk of neurological dysfunction such as autism and cerebral palsy. Gentle manipulation by a physician trained in cranial osteopathy can significantly improve the symptoms in children with these problems. In a 3-year study of 286 children, Dr. Frymann demonstrated that osteopathic treatment improved sensory, intellectual, and motor performance in children with neurological problems. Research conducted at Michigan State University further corroborated Dr. Frymann's findings.

What are we eating?

A third biological component in autism is diet. Many autistic children may have damaged intestinal tracts (possibly from vaccine injury or viruses) that cause them to be unable to break down the proteins in milk and wheat. When these partially digested proteins enter the blood stream they can cause the level of the brain chemical serotonin to be elevated, which leads to hypersensitivities to touch, loud noises, the tags on clothing, etc. This can eventually cause the child to enter an extremely self-focused, autistic state. Studies in Norway indicate that elimination of casein and gluten from the diet resulted in improvement in nearly 80% of autistic individuals.

Autism is a complex disorder and needs to be treated in a complete, holistic, and caring way. The osteopathic approach offers a comprehensive approach to children labeled with this disorder. Using holistic birthing methods and early structural evaluation and correction can do a great deal to prevent this disorder, Osteopathic evaluation and treatment of the whole child including the cranial area, neurofeedback, sound therapy according to Tomatis, herbal medicines and essential oil can be extremely beneficial for these children. In addition incorporating organic fresh fruits and vegetables into the diet will be markedly efficacious

CASE STUDY: ALEX

Consider the case of Alex. He was a firstborn, male child. His birth was difficult. His mother's labor continued for 27 hours. The nurse was instructed "to push the baby back" until the doctor arrived. 2 ½ hours using a vacuum extraction did not accomplish a vaginal delivery, and cesarean section became the procedure of choice.

As an infant Alex rarely slept more than 3 hours at a time. When he was awake, he screamed as if in pain, spit up after every feeding, and would only suck on one side of the breast. He favored sleeping on the right side and resisted sleeping on the left. When he was 6 months of age, his pediatrician noticed that the head was misshapen and advised the mother to do gentle neck stretching. However, his neck worsened with each immunization he received. This was dismissed as coincidental.

By 14 months old, Alex was saying 6 or 8 words but the pediatrician told the parents that he might be mildly delayed.

At 16 months Alex had his first MMR vaccination. He cried for more than 12 hours afterwards. His parents repeatedly called their HMO regarding his crying. They were told someone would call them back.

Eventually, a nurse returned their call and told them that severe crying was normal. She instructed them to give him Tylenol. After that, Alex developed chronic diarrhea. His pediatrician said that this was due to viruses and was normal.

Alex's eyes, once full of curiosity, now stared blankly into space. He never learned to crawl. At 20 months his parents were told he was moderately retarded and Occupational therapy was ordered once a week.

At three years old, Alex was classified as severely autistic and mentally retarded. His odd shaped head was dismissed as being unrelated. His apparent vaccine reaction and chronic diarrhea were again dismissed as being coincidental. The neurologist told the parents there was nothing to be done and they should not waste their money on "therapies."

Alex was given osteopathic treatment over a period of two years. After the second treatment he said "ball" for the first time. His chronic head banging stopped. After testing, Alex was placed on a gluten and casein-free diet. He was treated for yeast. He was seen by a developmental optometrist. He was found to have highly elevated arsenic levels and went through a chelation protocol to remove it from his body.

On evaluation by a neurologist, his parents were told that Alex never had severe autism. He functions now at grade level and gets along well with his peers. Without treatment, his parents believe, his life would be significantly different. Osteopathy can make a positive difference in children's lives.