

Autism Awareness Month

By Dr. Andrew Levinson

Autism is a disease of modernity. Whatever side of the argument regarding the cause of this epidemic that is wreaking havoc on a generation of children, doesn't change the fact that over the span of the last twenty years a disorder so rare, 1 in 15,000, that it was barely covered in medical school now affects 1 in 100 children in America. Much has changed in the world during that time period, but one of the most impressive is the type and amount of poisons in our environment and their contamination of our food supply. As a specialist with a focus on practical medical interventions to reverse these damages, I am acutely aware of the importance of good nutrition and organic high nutrient foods.

Autism or at least the spectrum of disorders that is the Autism of the last portion of the 20th and beginning of the 21st Century, is in all likelihood a different disorder than what was initially described in 1943. The alarming and epidemic increase in the diagnosis of Autism is not, as ascribed by some, the result of improved testing, new diagnostic criteria, or improved ability to diagnose. For whatever effect these might have, it would not have resulted in what is now a 150 fold increase in incidence as seen during the course of the last two decades. This change would have to be the result of some combination of external (environmental or iatrogenic) insults and thus make it a Disease of Modernity.

Though there is much we still have to learn about the cause of Autism, we do know that for most of those affected it is multi-factorial (i.e. there is no "smoking gun"). As a Disease of Modernity, a compelling framework for its cause is insult to the nervous system during developmentally critical time periods. Whether it results from mercury leached from maternal amalgam fillings, toxins present as adjuvants present in vaccines, pesticides from inorganic foods and pest control in the home and school, off-gassed chemicals in the "new car smell" or any of thousands of industrial pollutants that come from distant smoke-stacks and as close as the vinyl coating on an infant's mattress. Chemicals abound and in a genetically susceptible individual may result in the "critical mass" that begins the neurological regression that is called Autism.

Of the many biochemical similarities seen in spectrum children, one of the most poignant and defining is their seemingly limited ability to detoxify effectively. The "broken" Detox Pathways make the body's exposure to small amounts of toxic elements (e.g. Lead, Mercury, Arsenic, etc) significant but these same pathways are our body's only means to protect us from volatile organic compounds (VOCs), pesticides, and other synthetic materials (e.g. plastics). With failed detoxification, the poisons accumulate in the body leading to further degradation of crucial biochemical pathways and the resultant vicious circle perpetuates the toxic presence and effect. Another factor is that these poisons are synergistically toxic and it is well known that combining toxins decreases the amounts required for a lethal dose. Ergo, less would be needed for a toxic effect as well.

It is a crucial part of treatment to stop toxic exposure. Toxins have become ubiquitous and can penetrate our defenses from every corner. From the air we breathe outdoors, which is more likely than not to be contaminated with industrial pollutants to our indoor or in-vehicle air which is almost assured contaminated with vinyl off-gassing and flame retardants. Our foods are contaminated with pesticides, hormones and non-stick coatings from cookware. Water can suffer contamination with a host of pollutants as well. Whether through the digestive tract, the lungs or the skin we did not evolve with the defenses to protect us from the host of man-made

toxins in our current environment. Clean water and air, organic food and clothing and avoidance of many synthetic chemicals can be a “turnpike” toward recovery.

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