

AUTISM

More children are being diagnosed with autism than ever in the past, according to a new study of 289,456 children between the ages of 3 and 10 years in Atlanta, Georgia.

Autism, characterized by social isolation, difficulty communicating, repetitive behaviors and delayed and unusual speech, affected 34 out of every 10,000 children in the study. This rate, though consistent with those of recent studies, was higher than rates found in earlier studies conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s. Only four similar studies have been conducted in the United States to date. Three earlier studies found that about 4 per 10,000 children had autism, while a study in 1998 found that 40 per 10,000 children have autistic disorder – with the number increasing to 67 per 10,000, if all types of autism-like behavior are included.

According to researchers, there is a greater public awareness of the disorder and the symptoms associated with it, which may be one contributing factor to the increased rates of autism. Another reason may be the addition of autism as a condition for special education services.

However, researchers remain uncertain of whether environmental, immunologic, genetic or other factors are contributing to the increased rates of autism.

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DR. MERCOLA'S COMMENT:

It is good to see that the U.S. Center for Disease Control is finally officially acknowledging that we may be in the midst of an autism epidemic. This new report from the CDC finds that the number of autistic children living in the Atlanta, GA, region is high, 3.4 per 1,000, which is consistent with the more recent surveys. However, this study was actually a survey and all the data was obtained through analysis of records; no children were seen directly.

Previously, traditional medical experts would claim that this increase was an artifact of improved diagnosis. This is the classic traditional approach, but you don't need a degree in advanced pediatric neurology to diagnose a child with autism. An autistic child's behavior can usually be diagnosed by most people in a busy airport.

You can review the most comprehensive study that I am aware of on the epidemic of autism, done by the MIND Institute in California: [Report to the Legislature on the Principal Findings from The Epidemiology of Autism in California: A Comprehensive Pilot Study](#).

The study, led by [Dr. Robert S. Byrd](#), section chief of pediatrics at the University of California at Davis Children's Hospital, issued its report on August 17, 2002. It concludes there *is "no evidence that loosening in diagnostic criteria contributed to an increase in the number of children with autism,"* and that, therefore, *"some, if not all, of the observed increase represents a true increase in cases of autism."*

What does this mean? This research provides a rigorous benchmark for the prevalence of autism in a large metropolitan area, Atlanta, within the United States. Rates in Atlanta are consistent with other recent studies, and differ from those in previous decades.

The CDC researchers have documented an over 1,000 percent increase in the last 10 years, but these statistics still terribly underestimate the true number of children affected with this illness. At least one in every 175 children now has autism. Please check the links below for more accurate information.

Fortunately, there are some effective strategies for treating children with autism. I have treated many hundreds of children with autism and am quite confident that a severe restriction of grains and sugars produces a profound improvement in the brain injury that accompanies this illness.

Many parents recognize that a gluten and casein-free diet is important and frequently provides benefits. However, this is only a small portion of the dietary changes that are required. It is quite common for many children to follow a gluten and casein-free program and receive only minimal or no improvement. This is largely related to the fact that they are consuming other grains or grain-like starches such as potatoes, rice and corn. However, once the child rigidly follows a good, well-defined nutritional regimen there is quite a profound improvement in the disease.

The new modification of the nutrition plan includes generous portions of [Cod Liver Oil that has incredibly beneficial Omega-3 fats, Vitamin-D and the natural \(cis\) form of Vitamin A](#), which seems to provide an independent benefit in many children with autism.

There is a limited window of opportunity for improvement with autism though. The best results are seen when the program of severe grain restriction is implemented before the age of three. After three the likelihood of complete recovery seems to progressively decrease. That does not mean that the diet plan should not be used, it just suggests that the improvement may be less significant.

Diet changes are only one of a number of adjunctive therapies that are useful in treating autism. There are many behavioral approaches that work synergistically with an optimized nutrition program.

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