

## Food Sensitivities and Allergies in Autistic Children

**Randa Akram Youssef\***

*Specialist Psychiatrist, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services-CAMHS, AL Amal Psychiatric Hospital, Dubai, UAE*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Randa Akram Youssef, Specialist Psychiatrist, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services-CAMHS, AL Amal Psychiatric Hospital, Dubai, UAE.

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Many children with autism have food sensitivities, due to abnormalities in their digestive and/or immune systems. If food is not fully digested into individual sugars, amino acids, etc., then the partly digested food can cause the immune system in the gut to react to those foods.

This reaction is much more likely to occur if there is inflammation of the gut.

According to the 2010 US Guidelines for food allergy testing (Boyce, *et al.* 2010) and the European Food Allergy Diagnostic Criteria (Burks, *et al.* 2012), the gold standard for diagnosis of food allergy is observation, involving two steps:

1. Resolution of chronic symptoms after elimination of the offending food from the diet, which may take several days to 2 - 3 weeks for delayed-type food allergy, and
2. Recurrence of symptoms with reintroduction of the offending food.

For children with autism, symptoms may include changes in behavior, which may be due to pain and discomfort caused by reactions to food allergens.

### Explanation of treatment:

- Avoid foods that cause allergic reactions or symptoms.
- Consider other methods to heal the gut - many food allergies will disappear when gut inflammation is healed.
- May consider using a 4-day diet rotation, in which a given food is only eaten 1 day every four days, so that there is less likelihood of developing an allergy to it (this is a method typically used for patients with eosinophilic esophagitis and some patients with severe reactions to food proteins, but there is not a good scientific rationale and this method is still controversial).

### Benefits

Removing allergic foods can result in a wide range of improvements in some children, including gastrointestinal and improvements in behavior and attention.

### ARI survey of parent ratings of treatment efficacy

**Duration:** Some food allergies (like peanuts) seem to be lifelong, whereas others can disappear when gut inflammation is healed and/or the gut immune system develops tolerance to the offending food.

|                        | % Worse | % No Change | % Better | Number of Reports |
|------------------------|---------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| Food Allergy Treatment | 2%      | 31%         | 67%      | 1294              |
| Rotation Diet          | 2%      | 43%         | 55%      | 1097              |
| Removed Chocolate      | 2%      | 46%         | 52%      | 2264              |
| Removed Eggs           | 2%      | 53%         | 45%      | 1658              |

### Summary

Autism is a very complex disorder and involves many genetic and environmental factors that are not well-understood.

By following the treatments outlined above, many individuals will improve to some degree, usually slowly and steadily over months and years.

Sometimes one food regimen shows benefit, but it is more common that each regimen helps a small amount. However, the effect of multiple treatments can be substantial.

### ARI survey of parent ratings of treatment efficacy and safety

Most of the treatments listed on the following pages were evaluated as part of the Autism Research Institute (ARI) survey of over 27,000 parents on their opinion of the effectiveness of various treatments for children with autism. For a full copy of the latest ARI Survey, see the last page (For Asperger's see [www.autism.com](http://www.autism.com)).

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