
IS1. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN THE CAUSATION OF AUTISM AND RELATED DISORDERS

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It is now generally, but not universally, accepted that there is an increase in the incidence of autism in most parts of the world. It follows, therefore, that there must be environmental factors involved in the causation of the symptoms. These environmental factors will people who are genetically sensitive to these particular factors. It is most likely that the environmental factors and, therefore the genetic predispositions will vary with the time and the place. Each individual will be different and so will the treatments which are applicable to reduce the problems.

There are numerous possible environmental toxins which can affect individuals and it is likely that it is rarely going to be just one factor in isolation. The factors end to interact and can be synergistic. Amongst the numerous candidate factors are elements of the diet (especially gluten and casein); pesticides (particularly organophosphates); variations in intestinal bacteria; heavy metals (especially mercury) and infections and perhaps vaccines. In some cases, deficiencies of particular vitamins and minerals or unsaturated fatty acids can be factors. Understanding the clinical history of each individual subject together with supportive evidence from comparatively simple blood or urine tests can be used to inform and devise individualised treatment regimes. It is the responsibility of the professional to take detailed clinical histories of the subject and their families; to identify the individual symptoms and other signs which may not appear to be clinically relevant; to perform appropriate metabolic tests and monitor the results of each change, positive or negative, as the therapeutic programme is implemented.

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