

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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else helped very much, I finally began to give her a moderate daily dosage, without telling anyone except my wife, and before long we started getting raves from her teachers, speech language therapist, and others who were involved in her care. Her comprehension increased, she was better behaved and achieving more at school, and she was also easier to manage at home.... If no tablets are given for more than a day, she gets irritable and has more difficulty concentrating.

It's hard to say which one of us is "hooked" on the B6, but I have no reason to believe in something that doesn't work, and, thus far, the B6 is the one thing that appears to have made a difference. Agreed, it's all confounded with ongoing development, education, etc., but the turn-around, I believe, is traceable to the B6. For all those who are dubious, I can say, with some confidence, it's worth a try.

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To the Editor:

We have a seven-year-old son who was diagnosed three years ago with high functioning autism. He had progressed slowly, and we started searching for ways to help him.

We started [giving our son] DMG in February, and did not say anything to family, friends, or teachers. Within two weeks his teachers were telling us how much his speech had improved. That is when we told them what we had been giving him. They were astounded!

Since then, his speech has continued to improve, he has become more social, and is more receptive to being touched. The biggest improvement, though, is that he is finally toilet trained, albeit only during the day, but what a relief, and you should see how proud he is of himself!

The nicest remark came from one of our friends, who said that seeing our son's improvement was like watching a butterfly evolve from a cocoon.

A Colorado mom

Letters to the editor are welcome. Letters intended for publication must be signed and should not exceed two pages. Letters may be edited.

Nicotine patch for Tourette's: effective, but do health risks outweigh benefits?

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who had never used medications. After applying 10 mg transdermal nicotine patches for two consecutive days, the researchers evaluated the subjects' tic severity and found that the patches "significantly reduced the Yale Global Tic Severity Scale [scores] by an average of 50%, with no reported side effects, for up to four weeks."

—A study by Sanberg, B. J. McConville, and colleagues, using nicotine chewing gum to treat 10 Tourette's syndrome patients also taking Haldol and four patients using no other medications, revealed significant short-term reductions in tics in these subjects compared to a control group of patients chewing placebo gum. "In this study," the researchers say, "nicotine markedly potentiated haloperidol effects in treating Tourette's disorder, and showed lesser effects... when used alone."

Researchers hypothesize that nicotine reduces symptoms of Tourette's syndrome by altering the brain's use of dopamine. Abnormal dopamine metabolism has been implicated as a factor in the disorder.

Although many people with Tourette's syndrome appear to have fewer symptoms when using nicotine patches or nicotine gum, researchers caution that nicotine is a dangerous substance. Although nicotine itself is not carcinogenic, it is a precursor of chemicals called n-nitrosamines which have been linked to cancer in smokers. In addition, nicotine raises blood pressure and tightens arteries, restricting blood flow.

Interestingly, a recent study by K. R. Muller-Vahl and colleagues found that while cigarette smoking reduced tics in 7% of Tourette's patients who regularly smoked, two other substances—alcohol and marijuana—were even more effective. More than two-thirds of drinkers said that alcohol reduced their tics, and 85% of marijuana smokers said the drug caused marked improvement. The study adds to anecdotal evidence indicating that substance abuse by individuals with Tourette's syndrome often is a form of self-medication.

"Nicotine for the treatment of Tourette's syndrome," P. R. Sanberg, A. A. Silver, R. D. Shytle, M. K. Philipp, D. W. Cahill, H. M. Fogelson, and B. J. McConville; *Pharmacology and Therapeutics*, Vol. 74, No. 1, 1997, pp. 21-25. Address: P. R. Sanberg, Department of Surgery, University of South Florida College of Medicine, Tampa, FL 33612-4799.

—and—

"Differential effects of transdermal nicotine on microstructured analyses of tics in Tourette's syndrome: an open study," S. M. Dursun and M. A. Reveley; *Psychological Medicine*, Vol. 27, No. 2, March 1997, pp. 483-487. Address: S. M. Dursun, Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine,

University of Leicester, Stamford Hall, Leicester LE2 2ND, U.K.

—and—

"Gilles de la Tourette syndrome. Effect of nicotine, alcohol and marijuana on clinical symptoms," K. R. Muller-Vahl, H. Kolbe, and R. Dengler; *Nervenarzt*, Vol. 68, No. 12, December 1997, pp. 985-989. Address: K. R. Muller-Vahl, Neurologische Klinik mit Klinischer Neurophysiologie, Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Germany.

—and—

"Case study: long-term potentiation of neuroleptics with transdermal nicotine in Tourette's syndrome," A. A. Silver, R. D. Shytle, M. K. Philipp, and P. R. Sanberg; *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 35, No. 12, December 1996, pp. 1631-1636. Address: A. A. Silver, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine, University of South Florida College of Medicine, Tampa, FL 33612-4799.

—and—

"The effects of nicotine plus haloperidol compared to nicotine only and placebo nicotine only in reducing tic severity and frequency in Tourette's disorder," B. J. McConville, P. R. Sanberg, M. H. Fogelson, J. King, P. Cirino, K. W. Parker, and A. B. Norman; *Biological Psychiatry*, Vol. 31, No. 8, April 15, 1992, pp. 832-840. Address: B. J. McConville, Department of Psychiatry, University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Cincinnati, OH 45267-0559.

THE SECRET NIGHT WORLD OF CATS...

...is a children's storybook written by Helen Landalf and illustrated by her brother, autistic artist Mark Rimland. The just-published book was featured on the *CBS This Morning* show on June 22, and will be seen (albeit briefly) in the forthcoming MGM motion picture on autism, *Mollie*. The director, stars, and staff were so taken with Mark's cat drawings—30 of them—that they ordered eight books!

For a copy of *The Secret Night World of Cats*, autographed by Mark, send \$20.00 (in California, \$21.25)—cost includes postage and handling—to ARI, 4182 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116. Specify "Cat Book."