

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Therapies help; question re cord blood

To the Editor:

Last May, my 3-1/2-year-old son was diagnosed with autism. At this time, Nicholas could only say 10 words, was terrified of people, had many repetitive behaviors, didn't know how to play, and had very little eye contact. I had two doctors tell me, "There isn't much you can do with him except early intervention." After many hours of researching the Internet, I found your site. I started him on B6, DMG, magnesium, and vitamin C, plus I soaked him in Epsom salt baths for an hour every night. To my amazement, he started to have eye contact and less repetitive behaviors after a week! After three months, his vocabulary increased to about 200 spontaneous words. He also has about 80 percent eye contact, and is becoming very social. It's a blessing to see him come out of his shell and know that he will be able to function better in the world. He still has a long road ahead of him, but I have a lot of hope now.

I've been reading the latest research regarding cells taken from the umbilical cord. I know a lot of researchers feel that this could be the answer in curing many diseases and neurological disorders. I was wondering what your views are about cell transfusions and autism. My husband and I plan on trying for another baby, and I'm looking into storing the cells from the cord in case this would be a good idea.

Robin Dooley
San Jacinto, CA

Editor's note: Epsom salts benefit many autistic children because they provided needed magnesium and sulphur.

Regarding your question, we've received several letters on the topic of saving cord blood. Input from qualified readers regarding this issue is welcomed.

Compulsive eating

To the Editor: I am having a serious problem with my autistic daughter, and I was wondering if you could be of some help. She is only 12 years old, but now weighs 200 pounds. She began eating a little more than normal a few years ago, but we were able to control it somewhat. However, her desire for food now is extremely compulsive to the point where it is totally out of control. She wants to eat constantly. She will eat a whole pound of sliced lunchmeat, or an entire box of

cereal in one day or less. We try hiding food, but she tears the house apart looking for it. If we try to take it away, she is abusive to her sisters and me, and hits and pinches us. I would appreciate any advice you can give us.

A Scottsdale, Arizona mother

Editor's note: Autism has been reported to co-occur in some cases with Prader-Willi syndrome, which causes compulsive eating behavior similar to that you describe. (Prader-Willi is caused by a defect on chromosome 15, in an area also linked to autism.) Even if your daughter does not have Prader-Willi syndrome (a diagnosis that can be made through genetic testing), the behavior modification techniques used to help children with this syndrome may be effective. The Prader-Willi Syndrome Association (www.pwsausa.org) offers information on behavior management strategies.

Iron: a role in autism?

To the Editor:

I have been concerned that excess iron in my prenatal vitamins and supplements may have caused my daughter's autism. My prenatal vitamin had 60 mg of ferrous fumarate and I also took iron supplements (ferrous sulfate) twice daily. After researching the subject, I have come to believe my excess iron affected my levels of zinc, copper, and vitamin E.

I have found no studies of pregnant animals and iron. Doesn't it seem backwards to give healthy women iron supplements before any animal testing was conducted? I also learned women are supposed to be slightly anemic in the first trimester. This is Mother Nature's way of protecting the fetus from invading microorganisms (viruses and bacteria) which feed on iron.

Maureen Glickenberg
Poplar Grove, IL

Editor's Note: As far as I know, iron and, very rarely, vitamin A are the only supplements with significant possible effects on the developing fetus. (Vitamin A doses over 10,000 IU per day are not recommended during pregnancy.) ARI would be interested in hearing from any researchers who have investigated this topic.

Research indicates that iron overload during pregnancy interferes with zinc absorption, which could indeed affect the brain development of the fetus. In addition, one study reported an increase in seizures among children exposed prenatally to iron supplements, as compared to children whose mothers did not take these supplements during pregnancy unless they were iron-deficient.

Government panel backs intensive early education

Parents' efforts to obtain appropriate services for young autistic children received a boost recently, when a panel of experts convened by the National Research Council called on the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institutes of Health to promote early diagnosis and intensive early educational intervention.

The Council's recommendations include:

- placing children in intervention programs "as soon as an autism spectrum diagnosis is seriously considered;"
- Providing intensive instructional programming for a minimum of 25 hours per

The panel's report calls for providing autistic children with intensive instructional programming for a minimum of 25 hours per week, 12 months per year.

week, 12 months per year (less than the minimum of 40 hours per week recommended by many early intervention specialists, but far more than many programs currently provide);

- ensuring that curricula in early intervention programs are based on valid scientific research;
- providing one-on-one or small group instruction;
- including a parent training component, to enable parents to act as partners in the educational process;
- conducting continued evaluation and assessment of children's progress, and adapting programs accordingly.

In addition, the council recommended that "a special emphasis should be placed on training of trainers," saying, "There is a short supply of expertise and experience in the field of education for children with autistic spectrum disorders, and special attention should be paid to rapidly increasing the capabilities of the trainers, who may have experience in special education or related fields, but not in the special skills and practices for children with autistic spectrum disorders."

The panel of experts who drafted the recommendations was chaired by Catherine Lord of the University of Chicago, and included 12 experts in the fields of special education, speech and language pathology, psychiatry, and child neurology.

The National Research Council report, "Educating Children With Autism," June 2001, is available online at the Council's web site, <http://www.nas.edu>.

—see also—

"Pressing need seen to catch autism earlier," Lisa Fine, *Washington Post*, June 20, 2001, <http://washingtonpost.com>.

Letters to the Editor are welcome. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. Letters should not exceed two pages in length, including references.