

Dietary interventions for autism

While Aspect does not provide diet-related management of autism spectrum disorder, many families and individuals ask us whether they should consider using a diet-based intervention and whether this will help to improve the quality of life of a child or adult on the autism spectrum.

What are nutritional interventions?

Parents of children with autism, and adults on the autism spectrum, report using a variety of nutritional interventions that aim to treat symptoms of autism by managing or altering the individual's diet and nutrition. These interventions include diets, such as the gluten and casein-free diet (GFCF), the ketogenic diet and the yeast free diet; restriction of food allergens; and the use of probiotics and dietary supplements, such as vitamins A, C, B6, folic acid, B12, minerals (e.g. magnesium) and omega-3 fatty acids. ¹

No conclusive research evidence

Over the past two decades, research on the effect of diet and nutrition on autism has been increasing, with a focus on the role of food additives, refined sugar, food allergies, and fatty acid metabolism. ¹

However, there has been a lack of rigorous research studies in this field, and to date there is no sound conclusive research evidence to support the efficacy of any nutritional interventions in improving symptoms of autism spectrum disorder. ^{1,2,3,4}

In addition, for some interventions there are concerns side effects and a lack of rigorous evidence concerning safety; for example, for those on a gluten and casein-free diet, there may be a risk of decreased bone cortical thickness.

Supporting your personal choice

Without an evidence base, Aspect cannot recommend nutritional interventions as an effective way to improve any symptoms of autism spectrum disorder. However, many families and individuals may be aware of some of the positive anecdotal reports and may choose to use a nutritional intervention such as the CFCF diet. Aspect does support personal choice so, for these families and individuals, Aspect suggests any person on a nutritional intervention should do so under the guidance of a qualified health care professional, to make sure their nutrition uptake and possible side effects are well-considered and properly monitored. In addition, healthy nutritional habits should be encouraged in all children independently of the existence or non-existence of any neurodevelopmental condition.

References

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