

Healthy Habits

April 2006

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

April is time to learn about Autism

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It knows no ethnic, racial or socio-economic boundaries, no lifestyle or educational levels and can affect any family and any child. It's been linked to causes ranging from genetics to pollution to weakened immunity. However, the most important fact to know is that the number of those suffering from autism is growing every day.

Defining Autism

Autism is considered to be the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Current research suggests that there is no single cause of autism, but rather multiple causes working together in a cumulative fashion, and multiple paths leading to the disorder. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities. However, autism is still classified as a spectrum disorder, meaning it affects each individual differently and at varying degrees. This is why early diagnosis is so crucial. A child will begin benefiting from a specialized intervention program, once a diagnosis is made.

Signs of Autism

Autistic children are likely to develop slowly in three key areas: Social relationships and interactions; language and communication; and activities and interests. Individuals with autism often have numerous physical ailments such as allergies, asthma, epilepsy, digestive disorders, persistent viral infections, feeding disorders, sensory integration disorder and sleeping disorders. These signs alone are probably common to all children, but in conjunction, they should be nothing less than a call to action.



A child is diagnosed with autism every 21 minutes. Left unchecked, if you don't already know of someone with autism, you will soon.

Understanding Autism

Autism affects an estimated 1 in 166 births according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Roughly translated, this means as many as 1.5 million Americans today are believed to have some form of the disability. Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States and this number is still on the rise. At the current pace, the number of Americans affected with autism could reach 4 million in just the next decade. Whatever the cause, it is clear that children with autism are born with the disorder or are born with the potential to develop it. Bad parenting does not cause it. It is not a mental illness. Children with autism are not unruly kids who choose not to behave. Furthermore, no known psychological factors in the development of a child have been shown to cause autism. Still, more than ever before, people with autism can be helped. While researchers continue to look for common factors and links on the pathway to a cure, parents and educators can work together to help make key improvements to programs, training, and teaching methods. A combination of early diagnosis and intervention, special education, and family support is helping increasing numbers of children with autism to live more normal lives. Read more about autism at www.autism-society.org.

The material contained in Healthy Habits is not intended to be medical advice on any particular matter. Readers should seek appropriate professional advice before acting on the basis of any information contained in this publication. This information is provided courtesy of Optima Health.