



PRESS RELEASE

Dietary intervention may help some children with autism.

The results of a 2-year study indicate that use of a gluten- and casein-free diet may help ameliorate some of the symptoms of autism spectrum conditions for some children.

In conjunction with the Center for Autisme in Denmark and the Universities of Oslo and Stavanger in Norway, ESPA Research, a not-for-profit subsidiary of ESPA (Education and Services for People with Autism) along with the University of Sunderland, announce the publication of results for a 2-year research project looking at the effectiveness of a gluten and casein-free diet for children with autism. Group results of the Scandinavian - British (ScanBrit) randomised controlled dietary trial appear in the April 2010 edition of the journal *Nutritional Neuroscience*.

Autism is a life-long condition present in an estimated 1% of the population. It primarily affects the way a person communicates and deals with their social environment and people around them. Autism is poorly understood with currently no genetic or biological test to aid diagnosis. Whilst no universal intervention strategy has been found to manage the more complicated symptoms of autism, some parents have reported that changes to their child's diet did, in some cases, reduce some of the symptoms associated with autism.

"For many years parents of children with autism have been experimenting with changes to their child's diet" said Dr Paul Whiteley, from ESPA Research. "Some have reported a reduction of certain symptoms whilst a gluten and casein-free diet is being followed. In this investigation, we tested experimentally the effectiveness of such a diet using some of the gold-standard assessment instruments currently available in autism research. We found significant group changes to some autistic symptoms whilst participants were on diet compared to no diet in place".

In the study, 72 children with autism were randomly allocated to a diet or no-diet group. Following a battery of baseline tests and measurements, children allocated to the diet group followed the intervention with support from a study nutritionist. Whereas traditional studies of this type normally just compare intervention against non-intervention, the ScanBrit study also used an adaptive design setting specific targets of improvement to be met by children on diet in order to indicate any success of the intervention.

"Our results suggest that some children with autism may benefit from this type of intervention" Whiteley said. He cautions however that "dietary changes did not work for everyone and demonstrates the clear need for dietetic and medical support if such a restrictive regime is to be attempted".

The next stage of the research will try and predict those best- and non-responders to the diet on the basis of behavioural patterns and the analysis of urine samples taken over the course of intervention. Urinary analysis will be conducted on a state-of-the-art Q-TOF Mass Spectrometer recently acquired by ESPA Research.

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For more information, please contact ESPA Research on 0191 549 9300 or email us at: info@espa-research.org.uk. To find out more about the work of ESPA Research go to: www.espa-research.org.uk