

The PECS program starts by teaching the child how to exchange a picture for an object. Eventually, the individual is shown how to distinguish between pictures and symbols and use them to form sentences. Although PECS is based on visual tools, verbal reinforcement is a major component and verbal communication is encouraged. Standard PECS pictures can be purchased as a part of a manual or pictures can be gathered from photos, newspapers, magazines or other books.

Auditory Integration Training

Auditory Integration Training (AIT), sometimes called sound therapy, is often used to treat children with difficulties in auditory processing or sound sensitivity. Treatment with AIT involves the patient listening to electronically modified music through headphones during multiple sessions. There are different methods of AIT, including the Tomatis and Berard methods. While some individuals have reported improvements in auditory processing as a result of AIT, there are no credible studies that demonstrate its effectiveness or support its use.

Gluten free, casein free diet (GFCF)

Much has been said about the **gluten** free, **casein** free (GFCF) diet and its use to help individuals with autism. Many families with children newly diagnosed with autism wonder if it's something their child should follow. The GFCF diet was first developed for people with celiac disease, a disorder that involves a severe reaction to gluten in the diet. Gluten is found in wheat products such as bread and other bakery goods but also in a wide variety of other food products. Casein is a protein most associated with dairy products and

has potential to cause severe reactions in certain individuals. When used appropriately, the GFCF diet is safe and can help avoid these severe health problems.

The theory behind its use in autism is that if a person is having GI responses to these products, the resulting inflammation may damage the lining of the intestine and as a result lead to absorption of molecules that are not normally absorbed by healthy intestines. Some evidence suggests that these molecules or the inflammation they cause can interact with the brain in ways that cause problems such as anxiety, mood abnormalities, mental difficulties and perhaps worsen the behavioral symptoms of autism. That said, while the GFCF diet has been used in the autism community for a couple of decades, there is minimal evidence that it improves autism-related behaviors.

Families choosing a trial of dietary restriction should make sure their child is receiving adequate nutrition by consulting his or her pediatrician or a nutrition specialist. Dairy products are the most common source of calcium and Vitamin D for young children in the United States. Many young children depend on dairy products for a balanced, regular protein intake. Alternative sources of these nutrients require the substitution of other food and beverage products, with attention given to the nutritional content. Substitution of gluten-free products requires attention to the overall fiber and vitamin content of a child's diet. Vitamin supplements may have both benefits and side effects. Consultation with a dietician or physician is recommended for the healthy application of a GFCF diet. This may be especially true for children who are picky eaters.

