

## *Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders*

Many parents report **gastrointestinal (GI)** problems in their children with autism. The exact prevalence of gastrointestinal problems such as **gastritis, chronic constipation, colitis** and **esophagitis** in individuals with autism is unknown. Surveys have suggested that between 46 and 85% of children with autism have problems such as chronic constipation or diarrhea. One study identified a history of gastrointestinal symptoms (such as abnormal pattern of bowel movements, frequent constipation, frequent vomiting and frequent abdominal pain) in 70% of the children with autism. If your child has similar symptoms, you will want to consult a **gastroenterologist**, preferably one who works with people with autism. Your child's physician may be able to help you find an appropriate specialist. Pain caused by GI issues is sometimes recognized because of a change in a child's behavior, such as an increase in self-soothing behaviors like rocking or outbursts of aggression or self-injury. Bear in mind that your child may not have the language skills to communicate the pain caused by GI issues. Treating GI problems may result in improvement in your child's behavior. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some children may be helped by dietary intervention for GI issues, including the elimination of dairy and gluten containing foods. *(For more information, see [Gluten Free Casein Free diet in the treatment section of this kit.](#))* As with any treatment, it is best to consult your child's physician to develop a comprehensive plan. In January 2010, Autism Speaks initiated a campaign to inform pediatricians about the diagnosis and treatment of GI problems associated with autism.

**For additional information from the Official Journal of American Academy of Pediatrics, go to:** [pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/125/Supplement\\_1/S1](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/125/Supplement_1/S1).

**For information that can be shared with your child's doctor, go to:** [autismspeaks.org/press/gastrointestinal\\_treatment\\_guidelines.php](http://autismspeaks.org/press/gastrointestinal_treatment_guidelines.php).



## *Sleep dysfunction*

Is your child having trouble getting to sleep or sleeping through the night? Sleep problems are common in children and adolescents with autism. Having a child with sleep problems can affect the whole family. It can also have an impact on the ability of your child to benefit from therapy. Sometimes sleep issues may be caused by medical issues such as **obstructive sleep apnea** or **gastroesophageal reflux** and addressing the medical issues may solve the problem. In other cases, when there is no medical cause, sleep issues may be managed with behavioral interventions including **“sleep-hygiene”** measures, such as limiting the amount of sleep during the day and establishing regular bedtime routines. There is some evidence of abnormality of **melatonin** regulation in children with autism. While melatonin may be effective for improving the ability of children with autism to fall asleep, more research is needed. Melatonin or sleep aids of any kind should not be given without first consulting with your child's physician.

**For additional information on sleep issues visit:** [autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/sleep-tool-kit](http://autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/sleep-tool-kit).