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|  | "Autistic children are ineducable. You canít make them relate but you can teach them simple skills. Most autistic children will remain dependent all their lives. The prognosis for autistic children is poor"(Gerras 670).  These and similar depressing pronouncements are made so often that it would be asy to believe that they are the last words on the subject. There are, however, alternative treatments that have had success.  Based on extensive studies and research of autistic children in the last few decades, there has been an indication that vitamins may offer hope for a cure.  Autism is a personality disease in children which inhibits them from reacting to their environment. Children who are autistic in infancy do not learn to talk and others simply stop talking. They do not respond to people and seem not to see or hear them. They are completely withdrawn. The disease has been so unresponsive to treatment that it has caused despair for relatives of autistic individuals and their doctors.  In making a diagnosis of autism the following criteria is used...  1. Withdrawal from, or failure to become involved with, reality; in particular, failure to form a normal relationship with people.  2. Serious intellectual retardation with islets of higher, or nearly normal or exceptional intellectual functions or skills.  3. Failure to acquire speech, or to maintain or improve on speech already learned. or to use what speech has been acquired for communication.  4. Abnormal response to one or more types of sensory stimulus.  5. Gross and sustained exhibition of mannerisms or peculiarities of movement, including immobility and hyperkineses, and excluding tics.  6. Pathological resistance to change. This may be shown by:  a. Insistence on observance of rituals in the patientís own behavior or in those around him.  b. Pathological attachment to the same surroundings, equipment, toys and people (even though the relationsip with the person involved may be purely mechanical and emotionally empty).  c. Excessive preoccupation with particular objects or certain characteristics of them without regard for their accepted functions.  d. Severe anger or terror or excitement, or increased withdrawal, when the sameness of the environment is threatened.  In general, it is a lifelong developmental disability. The many different symprtoms of autism can occur by themseleves or in combination with other conditions.  Autism begins during infancy or childhood. Generally, parents get a diagnosis before thier child is thirty-six months old, but later diagnosis sometimes occurs. In some children symptoms become less severe around ages five or six.  Some children with autism are more disabled by their disorder than others. In the United States, there are at least 360,000 people with autism, one-third of whom are children. Autism is the fourth most common developmental disability. It occurs in about four to five of every ten thousand births. Children with the most severe form of this disorder probably make up only about 2-3 percent of children with autism. However, regardless of the number of severity of symptoms, the treatment for all of these children is basically the same.  The majority of children with autism cluster around the midpoint of the range. However, with any given child, each symptom can also be present in varying degrees of mildness or severity. In other words, some of the childís autistic symptoms may be milder than other. For example, a child with seriously impaired social skills may have normal or near normal cognitive skills. For this reason, labels like ìPervasive Developmental Disorder,î and ìAutistic-likeî are used. The examples below illustrate the possible range of severity for two of autismís primary symptoms - problems with social interactions and problems with communication. Also listed are behavioral symptoms. The mildest symptoms - those closest to "normal" behavior - come first, followed by the more severe symptoms.  **Social Interactions**  Shows little or no interest in making friends  Does not imitate others' actions  Does not interact playfully  Avoids eye-contact  Seems unaware of others' existence; treats family members and strangers interchangeably  **Communication**  Has difficulty maintaining a conversation  Lacks imagination or the ability to pretend  Does not use symbolic gestures such as waiving  Cannot communicate with words or gestures  **Behavioral Symptoms**  Is physically inactive, or passive  Does not respond to requests by familiar people  Has picky eating habits  Throws frequent tantrums, often for no known reason  Behaves aggresively, physically attacking or injuring others  Injures self with behavior such as head-banging  Why do children have autism?  Scientists do not know why some children have autism. Some autism can be inherited; to date, scientists have only identified one specific genetic connection with autism- a condition called Fragile-X syndrome. This condition, in which one part of the X-chromosome has a defect, affects about 7-10 percent of people with autism. A child's autism is probably due to a combination of neurological and biochemical disorders.  Megavitamin Therapy  Also known as orthomolecular medicine, this branch of healing involves using large amounts of vitamins to reach the effect drugs might normally achieve. Mental illness has been the first testing ground for magavitamin therapy. Schizophrenia was the first target of large scale megavitamin therapy. In 1952 Abram Hoffer began using high levels of niacin and other vitamins, especially Vitamin C, to treat patients sugffering from this disease. Three- quarters of these sufferers were reported to have improved. Later Linus Pauling "coined the phrase orthomolecular psychiatry to describe an even broader effort to attack mental problems using natural methods. Dr. Pauling says his concept involves the treatment of mental disease by the provision of the optimum molecular environment of the mind, especially the optimum concentrations of substances normally present in the human body" (Gerras 74). This opened up other areas ranging from treatment of learning disabilities t treatment of alcoholism, depression, a wide range of heart probvlems and even cancer.  Adjusting Biochemistry with Vitamins  According to some doctors, the recovery of patients through megavitamin therapy is not a miracle. They believe that patients improve simply because abnormal brain chemistry has been identified and corrected by megadoses of appropriate nutrients, and with this help the brain can function normally. It has been found that many different disorders can be improved by correcting biochemical imbalances.  **Vitamins Offer Hope for Autistic Children**  Until May 1973, there was little hope of a successful treatment for autism. Then, at a conference of the Canadian Schizophrenia Foundation held in Toronto, it was demonstrated that autistic children responded well to ortomolecular treatment. A research psychologist from San Diego, Bernard Timland, told the Toronto meeting a compelling story of the happy results of using megavitamins to treat a group of such children.  "*I began to get letters from parents describing the results of these experiments they had tried. The Times article was not explicit enough to tell the parents what kinds of vitamins to use and what dosages, so there was quite a variation in vitamins and dosages. As I read these reports it became evident that some children had shown remarkable improvement on the vitamins. The parents were reporting good results when the vitamins were taken and a resumption of symptoms when they stopped.*"  This sparked Dr. Rimland's interest and he decided to make a survey of all parents on his mailing list at the Institute for Child Behavior Research. About 60 parents responded and Dr.Rimland found that there were four vitamins that were outstanding in their positive effects. These were *niacinamide (B3)*, *pantothenic acid, B6*, and *vitamin C.* As the megavitamin proponents steadily emphasize, vitamin C and the B vitamins are water-soluble, so there is no danger of overdose because the body simply eliminates what it doesn't use.  On the basis of these reports, Dr. Rimland and his staff designed a special vitamin formula and then enrolled about 300 children in a nationwide study. They required that any child taking part had to be under medical supervision. The study was designed so that the children were on the vitamins for a three-month period and then off for one month to see if there was a deterioration. Then, treatment was resumed for a short time to see if the behavior would again improve. Depending on the childís weight, dosages were one, two , or three grams a day of vitamin C, the same amount of niacinamide, 150-450mg of B6,a dn 200mg of pantothenic acid, plus a high potency multiple B tablet. Later magnesium was also added.  Both the parents and physicians were asked to complete a form periodically giving their obvservaiton of the childís behavior improvements relating to speech, alertness, sleeping habits, eating habits, tantrums, and other kinds of behavior. Before beginning the study, each of the parents completed a detailed form on their childís birth history and medical background and this information was recorded on a computer. |

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