

You are Aiden and you know about Anshu very well. Anshu is 21 years old and has profound autism. He is non-verbal, non-expressive, and hyperactive, elements that have significantly shaped our family life. He has the cognitive abilities of a 1-year-old kid.

Early Years (Birth to Diagnosis)

On July 8, 2002, our family was blessed with the arrival of Anshu. He was born as the sun rose over Lucknow, casting a golden glow that seemed to herald his entry into our world. His birth brought not just a new member to our family but a new kind of love and joy that we had never experienced before.

The first few years of Anshu's life were like a beautiful, unfolding story. We celebrated each of his milestones with immense joy - his first smile that lit up the room, his first attempts at crawling which were clumsy yet determined, and the way his eyes sparkled with curiosity at the sight of new things. Each of these moments was treasured and captured not just in photographs but deep in our hearts.

However, as Anshu grew, we began to notice subtle differences between him and other children his age. He seemed to be in a world of his own, often lost in thought. Unlike other toddlers, his babbling was limited, and he seldom made eye contact. These were the early signs that made us wonder and sometimes worry, but we held onto the hope that every child is different.

As Anshu approached his second birthday, our concerns intensified. He was quieter than other children and rarely engaged with his surroundings. His interactions were mostly limited to brief moments. It was then we decided it was time to seek guidance and help.

The journey towards understanding Anshu's condition was fraught with uncertainty and apprehension. We consulted with numerous pediatricians and specialists, each visit filled with a mix of hope and nervousness. These appointments often left us with more questions than answers, but we persisted, driven by our love for Anshu and the desire to understand his world better.

Finally, after a series of assessments and consultations, the diagnosis was confirmed: Anshu was on the autism spectrum. This revelation brought a mix of emotions. There was relief in finally having an answer, a name to the myriad of questions that had clouded our minds. But there was also an overwhelming sense of concern about what this meant for Anshu's future and how we, as a family, would navigate this new path.

In the years following his diagnosis, our family embarked on a journey of learning and adaptation. We educated ourselves about autism, striving to understand how Anshu perceives and interacts with the world. We learned to tune into his unique needs and find ways to communicate with him in his language. It was a period of growth for all of us, filled with challenges but also moments of profound connection and understanding.

Despite the obstacles we faced, the bond of love within our family remained our greatest strength. It was this unyielding bond that carried us through the tough times and kept us united as we navigated the complexities of life with autism.

Through it all, Anshu remained at the heart of our family – a unique, beautiful soul who taught us about resilience, love, and the beauty of seeing the world through different eyes.

Development and Challenges

After Anshu's autism diagnosis, our family's journey took a path filled with unique challenges and profound learning experiences. Anshu's developmental trajectory diverged significantly from typical childhood milestones. He remained nonverbal throughout his early years, developing his unique language through gestures and expressions. We, as a family, gradually learned to decipher and understand these nonverbal cues, building a bridge of communication in our own special way.

Anshu's profound autism meant his mental development paralleled that of a much younger child. He perceived the world with a pure, unfiltered lens, bringing a unique perspective into our lives. However, this also meant that he required continuous care and supervision, similar to that needed for a toddler. His hyperactivity was a notable characteristic; he possessed an inexhaustible energy, constantly exploring and interacting with his environment. This endearing trait, however, posed significant safety concerns, demanding our constant vigilance to prevent accidents, especially since he had little awareness of danger.

One of the most pressing challenges we faced was Anshu's tendency to climb on furniture and windows, driven by his boundless curiosity and unawareness of risks. This led to several alarming incidents where his safety was compromised. Additionally, his hyperactivity meant that he rarely rested or slept for long hours, constantly seeking new stimuli.

Another major concern was his inclination towards pica, a condition where individuals eat non-food items. This behavior was particularly distressing and dangerous. We experienced frightening incidents, such as Anshu consuming cement, soil, or even attempting to drink toilet cleaner. These incidents underscored the need for us to be extraordinarily cautious about what was accessible to him.

These challenges, while daunting, brought us closer as a family. We restructured our home and lifestyle to provide a safe, supportive environment for Anshu. Every day was filled with both trials and moments of joy, deepening our understanding and love for him.

As Anshu's mother, managing his healthcare has been an ongoing journey marked by vigilance and adaptation. His epilepsy, which began manifesting in 2016, added another layer of complexity to our lives. The year 2017 was particularly challenging, with Anshu experiencing frequent seizures that left us feeling powerless and scared. Fortunately, with regular medication,

specifically Oxetol, his seizures were brought under control. However, they recently resurfaced, a reminder of the unpredictability of this condition.

Witnessing Anshu's seizures is heart-wrenching. During an episode, his eyes roll back, and he experiences uncontrollable shaking for several minutes. The first time it happened, I was overwhelmed with confusion and fear. Despite the expertise of doctors like Dr. Gupta in Lucknow and Dr. Shah in Mumbai, who have been instrumental in managing Anshu's epilepsy, the recent recurrence of seizures has been a setback.

Daily, we ensure Anshu takes his Oxetol, along with his other autism medications. These medicines are essential but come with their own set of challenges, such as managing side effects and maintaining strict adherence to the medication schedule. Our life in Lucknow, while filled with love and unwavering care, is a testament to the complexities and resilience required in raising a child with profound autism and epilepsy.

Mother's Entry:

"Life with Anshu in our Lucknow home is a tapestry of challenges and joys, each day bringing its unique experiences. The house resonates with Anshu's boundless energy. His favorite spot is the swing in our living room. We installed it especially for him, and it has become his sanctuary. The gentle, rhythmic motion of the swing seems to soothe him, providing a sense of tranquility and happiness. On his birthday, we have a cherished tradition – we adorn his swing with a colorful array of flowers and balloons. Watching him on his swing, immersed in happiness, his face breaking into a rare, heartwarming smile, is a moment we look forward to every year.

Meal times with Anshu are an adventure in themselves. He has specific likes and dislikes, particularly a strong aversion to curd and any dish made from it. We discovered this the hard way when he rejected curd rice vehemently. Unlike most children, Anshu does not have a sweet tooth, which is quite rare. To cater to his preferences, our kitchen is always stocked with his favorite savory snacks, each carefully selected to match his palate.

Navigating healthcare in Lucknow for a child like Anshu presents its own set of challenges. While we have access to some facilities, there are times when we need specialized care, prompting us to travel to cities like Delhi and Mumbai. However, Anshu finds it distressing to be in unfamiliar environments, which makes these trips quite difficult. Therefore, we try our best to limit our travels and seek local solutions whenever possible."

Father's Entry:

"Caring for Anshu is a journey that requires immense patience and constant awareness. His quick movements mean that we must always be on our guard. Whenever we step outside, I make it a point to hold his hand firmly. It's a simple yet crucial measure to ensure his safety in the bustling streets of Lucknow.

Grooming Anshu, particularly shaving him, is an exercise in precision and care. Due to his tendency to move unpredictably, I have to be extremely cautious to avoid any accidents. These moments, though challenging, remind me of the special attention and love that Anshu requires in his daily life.

Over the years, Anshu's hyperactivity has somewhat decreased, but his curiosity remains as vibrant as ever. To accommodate this, we've made several modifications to our home to ensure his safety. A particularly alarming incident was when Anshu nearly climbed out of a window, lured by the sight of neighborhood children playing. This prompted us to install safety grills and secure locks on all windows, a necessary step to prevent any potential dangers and give us some peace of mind."

Sister's Entry:

"Growing up with Anshu, my brother, has been an enlightening journey of patience and empathy. He has his own unique ways that have become a part of our daily life. For instance, Anshu rarely sits still, constantly seeking movement and stimulation, except when he's on his swing. That's his sanctuary, where he finds peace and contentment.

Understanding Anshu's needs and emotions, especially since he doesn't express much verbally, has been a learning curve. We've become attuned to his reactions - like how he gets agitated with loud noises or feels overwhelmed in crowded places. So, we've adapted our lifestyle to avoid such situations and create an environment where he feels secure and calm.

Mother's Perspective:

Anshu's presence has profoundly shaped our family dynamics. The journey hasn't been easy, with health concerns and constant worries being a part of our everyday life. Yet, it's these challenges that have brought us closer as a unit. We've learned to cherish the small victories and moments of joy that come our way.

Anshu is an early riser, often waking up before the rest of us to spend time on his swing. His sleep patterns are irregular, requiring constant supervision. He often resists sleep, and we need to hold him until he finally succumbs to exhaustion.

His dietary habits are specific - he enjoys traditional Indian breakfasts like poha or upma. We're mindful of his diet to avoid weight issues, and he starts his day with plain milk, staying away from caffeine.

Bathing Anshu is a task that demands attention and patience. He enjoys water, which can make bath time playful yet challenging. As he's grown taller, controlling his movements, such as holding his hair, has become necessary for both his and my safety.

Managing Anshu's constipation is a regular concern. We use traditional Indian remedies like Isabgol (Psyllium husk) to help his digestion. Adapting to a western toilet was essential for his comfort and convenience.

His daily routine includes therapy sessions like ABA and occupational therapy, crucial for his development. These sessions aid his motor skills and help with behavioral challenges. Anshu doesn't take afternoon naps, making it essential to plan his activities throughout the day.

In the evenings, he goes for walks, a vital part of his routine for outdoor exposure. His evenings are spent engaging in simple activities in the living room.

Dinner is tailored to his dietary needs, and we try to ensure he's in bed by 10 PM. This routine reflects our family's adaptability and resilience.

Sisters' Involvement:

Despite being away for studies, my sisters, Sheenu and Gracy, are deeply involved in Anshu's life. They ensure to video call daily, maintaining their bond with Anshu and keeping abreast of his day-to-day life. Sheenu, with her medical background, actively discusses Anshu's health and medication with our parents, offering valuable advice and insights.

Family Dynamics:

Our family life revolves around Anshu's needs. We've structured our daily routine to ensure his comfort and safety. Large gatherings at home are avoided as Anshu feels anxious in crowded settings.

Special Moments:

Anshu has preferences for certain textures and colors. He adores his collection of soft, brightly colored blankets, and his room is painted in a calming shade of blue, his favorite color. It's a space designed for sensory comfort, filled with objects that bring him a sense of calm and happiness.

Challenges and Adaptations:

We continuously adapt to meet Anshu's unique needs, like managing his dietary preferences. The kitchen often experiments with recipes to suit his taste while ensuring nutritional value. A specially prepared khichdi is one of his favorite meals, which he enjoys immensely.

Health Issues and Treatments

Epilepsy and Its Management:

Anshu's journey with epilepsy has been a significant aspect of his overall health care. Diagnosed in his early childhood, managing his epilepsy has been a continuous process. The primary medication used has been Oxetol, a commonly prescribed anticonvulsant in India. Oxetol, known generically as Oxcarbazepine, is effective in controlling seizures by stabilizing the electrical activity in the brain.

Despite the effectiveness of Oxetol, Anshu has experienced periods of increased seizure activity. During these times, his treatment plan has been adjusted, often in consultation with neurologists specialized in pediatric epilepsy. These adjustments have included dosage changes and, at times, the addition of other medications like Levetiracetam, another anticonvulsant, to enhance seizure control.

Challenges with Autism and Seizures:

Managing epilepsy in the context of severe autism like Anshu's presents unique challenges. Seizures can disrupt the routines that are crucial for individuals with autism, causing significant distress. Moreover, the side effects of anticonvulsants, such as drowsiness or irritability, can further complicate behavioral management in autism.

Stem Cell Treatments:

In seeking additional treatments for Anshu's condition, the family explored the option of stem cell therapy. This innovative treatment has been gaining attention in India for its potential benefits in various neurological conditions, including autism and epilepsy. However, it's important to note that stem cell therapy for these conditions is still in the experimental stages and is not widely endorsed as a standard treatment.

Anshu underwent a stem cell treatment at a specialized medical center in India. This treatment involved the transplantation of stem cells with the aim of repairing or replacing damaged neurons and modulating the immune system. Following the treatment, Anshu showed some improvements in his overall behavior and a slight reduction in seizure frequency. However, these changes were gradual and required continuous monitoring and assessment.

It's crucial to understand that while stem cell therapy holds promise, its effects can vary significantly from person to person, and it is not a cure for autism or epilepsy. The decision to pursue such a treatment involved extensive discussions with healthcare professionals and consideration of both the potential benefits and uncertainties.

Ongoing Healthcare Management:

Anshu's healthcare regimen also includes regular consultations with a pediatrician and a neurologist, routine blood tests to monitor the levels of anticonvulsants, and continuous assessment of his behavioral and cognitive development. His diet is carefully monitored, focusing on nutrition that supports overall health and well-being.

His family has also incorporated various therapies, such as occupational therapy and speech therapy, as part of his comprehensive treatment plan. These therapies are aimed at improving his functional abilities and enhancing his quality of life.

Day 1:

Morning Routine: Anshu wakes up at 6:30 AM. He spends 30 minutes on his swing, which helps him transition from sleep to wakefulness. Breakfast at 7:15 AM includes poha and a glass of plain milk.

Therapy Sessions: 9:00 AM - Occupational therapy session focusing on fine motor skills. Anshu responds well to tactile activities.

Midday: Lunch at 12:30 PM. Anshu enjoys a homemade meal of dal, rice, and a vegetable stir-fry. He takes his midday dose of Oxetol.

Afternoon Activities: A walk in the garden at 3:00 PM. Anshu shows interest in the flowers and butterflies.

Evening Routine: Dinner at 7:30 PM, consisting of khichdi. Bath time is at 8:00 PM, followed by a calming bedtime story. Anshu takes Isabgol before bed for his constipation.

Bedtime: Anshu struggles to fall asleep, requiring extra time with his mother holding him. Sleeps by 10:30 PM.

Day 2:

Morning Routine: Wakes up early at 6:00 AM. Anshu is slightly restless, spends an hour on his swing. Breakfast is upma and milk.

Health Check: A routine check-up with the pediatrician at 10:00 AM. Anshu is uneasy with the new environment, needs reassurance.

Midday: Lunch is at 1:00 PM. Anshu has chapatis and a vegetable curry.

Afternoon Activities: Quiet time with sensory toys in his room. Anshu is calm and engaged.

Evening Routine: Family dinner at 8:00 PM. Anshu enjoys a light meal of lentil soup and rice.

Bath time is playful but under control.

Bedtime: Anshu falls asleep while listening to a soothing music playlist, asleep by 9:45 PM.

Day 3:

Morning Routine: Anshu wakes at 7:00 AM. After his time on the swing, breakfast includes scrambled eggs and toast.

Therapy Sessions: Speech therapy at 10:00 AM. Focuses on non-verbal communication cues. Challenging but productive.

Midday: A lunch of rice and fish curry at 12:45 PM. Anshu shows a preference for the fish.

Afternoon Activities: Visit to a nearby park. Anshu is fascinated by the ducks in the pond.

Evening Routine: Early dinner at 7:00 PM. A simple meal of vegetable khichdi. Bath time is quick and efficient.

Bedtime: Reads a picture book with his father. Asleep by 10:00 PM after his night-time medication.

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Crackers and Asthma: The family refrains from bursting loud crackers, considering Anshu's fear and his asthma. However, neighborhood noises are unavoidable. Anshu shows signs of distress, covering his ears and becoming increasingly restless. To manage his asthma, which gets aggravated by smoke and stress, he takes his regular medication, Montelukast, a preventive asthma medication, along with a bronchodilator inhaler (like Salbutamol) as needed for immediate relief.

Bedtime: Anshu is visibly upset and takes longer to calm down for bed. He eventually falls asleep around 11:00 PM, later than usual, with his mother staying beside him.

Indicating Thirst and Hunger:

Anshu's way of communicating his needs, like hunger and thirst, is unique due to his profound autism. He doesn't use verbal cues to express these needs. Instead, he becomes noticeably more hyperactive. When he's thirsty or hungry, Anshu tends to swing very fast and starts making a variety of noises. This change in behavior is a signal for the family to check if he needs food or water.

It's also observed that Anshu exhibits similar behavior when he's in pain or hasn't slept well. This overlapping of signals can sometimes make it challenging to immediately discern what Anshu needs, requiring the family to assess different possibilities to understand and meet his requirements.

Beverage Preferences:

Milk: Anshu likes milk and drinks it lukewarm. He has it twice a day, one glass each time. Milk is a staple in his diet, and the family ensures it's at a temperature he prefers.

Coconut Water: He enjoys coconut water, which is a healthy and hydrating option for him. Given its natural electrolytes and nutrients, it's a beneficial choice for his overall hydration.

Juices: Anshu likes various juices. The family makes sure these are fresh and not too high in sugar. His juice intake is monitored to ensure it's in moderation, considering his overall diet and nutritional needs.

Mango Shake: His favorite drink is a mango shake. He absolutely loves it. This is often given as a treat or during mango season. The family prepares it with fresh mangoes, blending them with milk to create a shake that Anshu finds both delicious and comforting.

Dietary Restrictions:

No Cold Beverages: Anshu does not consume cold beverages. This decision is based on his personal preference and also to avoid any potential discomfort or health issues that cold drinks might cause.

No Caffeine: Anshu's diet excludes caffeine. Considering his hyperactivity and the potential effects of caffeine on his behavior and sleep patterns, the family avoids giving him any caffeinated drinks.

Signs of Hunger:

Anshu exhibits distinct behaviors when he feels hungry:

Roaming Around the Kitchen: One of the clear indicators that Anshu is hungry is when he starts roaming around the kitchen. This behavior suggests he is looking for food or is aware that the kitchen is where his meals are prepared.

Snatching Food: He may also snatch food from people who are eating around him, indicating his immediate hunger or interest in what others are eating.

Food Preferences:

Stuffed Parathas: Anshu enjoys stuffed parathas, especially those filled with aloo (potato) and paneer (cottage cheese). Even though paneer makes him a bit hyperactive, it is one of his favorites.

Palak Paneer: He has a fondness for palak paneer (spinach and cottage cheese curry), which he tolerates well despite his preference for less spicy food.

Biscuits in Tea: Anshu likes dipping Parle-G biscuits in tea, a common snack in many Indian households.

Fast Food: Influenced by his sisters, Sheenu and Gracy, who often eat out, Anshu has developed a liking for outside food such as pizza, burgers, and Indian fast food.

Homemade Non-Vegetarian Dishes: Anshu loves the mutton curry and chicken curry made by his mother. His absolute favorite, according to his mother, is the homemade Keema Kaleji (minced mutton and liver). The dish is made with a variety of spices and herbs, providing a rich and flavorful meal that Anshu enjoys immensely.

Keema Kaleji Recipe:

Ingredients:

- 750 grams Mutton, minced
- 400 grams Mutton liver (Kaleji)
- 4 Onions, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp Ginger, minced
- 2.5 tbsp Garlic, minced
- 6 Green Chillies
- 1/2 tsp Turmeric powder
- 2.5 tbsp Coriander Powder
- 1.5 tbsp Red Chilli powder
- 1/2 cup Curd (sour)
- 1/2 cup Mustard oil
- 5 Mint Leaves
- Salt, to taste
- Lemon juice, a few drops

Fresh Coriander Leaves for garnish

Whole Spices:

2 Bay leaves

5 Cloves

5 Black Peppercorns

2 Black Cardamoms

4 Green Cardamoms

1 inch Cinnamon Stick

1 tsp Mace

4 Dry Red Chillies

Preparation:

Wash and rinse keema and kaleji under running water.

Heat oil in a wok on low flame, add whole spices, and let them splutter.

Add chopped onions and sauté till golden. Then add minced ginger and garlic and fry till the raw smell goes off.

Whisk curd in a bowl to break lumps.

Add keema and kaleji to the onion mixture and mix well.

Increase flame, fry till moisture evaporates, then add whisked curd.

Add turmeric powder and salt, stir. Lower the flames, cover, and let it cook for 20-25 minutes.

Add chopped mint leaves for flavor.

Once softened, add red chili powder and coriander powder. Cook on high flame till water is absorbed and oil starts separating.

Adjust oil and salt if needed, and cook till done.

Drizzle with lemon juice, turn off the gas, and garnish with chopped coriander.

Anshu's Typical Meal Setup

Favorite Dal: Anshu's favorite dal (lentil) is Arhar Dal (pigeon pea lentil). It is a staple in his diet and often forms a part of his basic meal. Arhar Dal is not only nutritious but also easily adaptable to different tastes, making it a versatile dish for daily consumption.

Meal Composition: A standard meal for Anshu consists of two rotis (Indian flatbreads), dal, a vegetable dish, and rice. This combination ensures a balanced intake of carbohydrates, proteins, and vitamins.

Adaptation for Eating: Since Anshu doesn't chew much, the family has adapted the way they serve his food. They mince the rotis and mix them with dal to make them softer and easier to eat. This method helps Anshu swallow his food more easily and reduces the risk of choking.

Vegetable Accompaniment: Along with dal and rotis, a portion of vegetables is included to provide essential nutrients and variety in his diet. The vegetables are cooked to be soft enough for Anshu to eat comfortably.

Feeding Method: Anshu is fed by hand, which is a common practice in many Indian households. This method allows his family to ensure that he is eating adequately and also provides a moment of close interaction and care. Hand-feeding can be a nurturing experience, strengthening the bond between Anshu and his family members.

Ensuring Complete Meals: Anshu usually finishes his meals, suggesting that the adaptations made by the family are effective in meeting his dietary needs. The family's attentiveness to his eating habits and preferences ensures that Anshu receives the necessary nutrition in a manner that is comfortable and enjoyable for him.

Identifying Discomfort or Pain:

Behavioral Changes: Anshu's expressions of discomfort or pain are primarily behavioral. He becomes noticeably irritated and may start making a lot of noise, which is a significant deviation from his usual behavior. This can include vocalizations or non-verbal sounds that indicate distress.

Physical Activity: An increase in physical activity, such as running around and becoming hyperactive, is another sign that Anshu is experiencing discomfort or pain. This behavior is a form of self-expression, as he may not be able to verbally communicate what he is feeling.

Difficulty in Understanding the Cause: One of the challenges for Anshu's family is determining the exact cause of his discomfort. Due to his limited communication abilities, it can be difficult to understand whether his distress is due to physical pain, emotional upset, or something else.

Managing Pain and Discomfort:

Medication for Fever and Pain: For fever, the family typically administers Dolo (a brand of Paracetamol in India). For pain relief, they use Calpol (another Paracetamol-based medication) and, at times, Combiflam (a combination of Ibuprofen and Paracetamol). These medications are commonly used in India and are effective in treating mild to moderate pain and fever.

Ensuring Rest: The family tries to encourage Anshu to rest or lie down in bed when he is in pain. However, this can be challenging as Anshu tends to become restless and doesn't rest easily when he is uncomfortable.

Observation and Care: Close observation is key in these situations. The family pays attention to any changes in Anshu's usual behavior patterns and looks for potential causes of discomfort. This might include checking for any physical injuries, signs of illness, or environmental factors that could be causing distress.

Seeking Medical Advice: In cases where the cause of pain or discomfort is not clear, or if Anshu's distress seems severe, the family consults with their pediatrician or a specialist to ensure proper care and treatment.

Food Dislikes and Potential Allergies:

Uncertainty Around Eggs: Given the family history of egg allergies, there is a possibility that Anshu may also be at risk. While he currently consumes eggs without any noticeable adverse reactions, the family remains cautious. Allergies can indeed develop over time or may present subtle symptoms that might not be immediately apparent, especially in a child with communication challenges like Anshu.

Monitoring for Allergic Reactions: When Anshu eats eggs, the family carefully observes for any signs of an allergic reaction. This could include skin reactions like hives or eczema, gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea or diarrhea, or respiratory symptoms like coughing or wheezing. If any such symptoms are observed, the family plans to consult a doctor immediately.

Avoiding Known Allergens: As a precaution, the family avoids any other known allergens, especially those common in the family history. This proactive approach helps in minimizing the risk of allergic reactions.

Food Dislikes: In terms of dislikes, Anshu has shown aversion to certain foods, mainly due to texture or taste preferences. For instance, he dislikes very cold beverages and highly spicy foods. The family respects these preferences and adapts his meals accordingly.

Dietary Adjustments: Considering the potential risk of egg allergy, the family has contemplated gradually reducing Anshu's egg intake and substituting it with other protein sources. This might include increasing his intake of legumes, dairy products, or other non-egg-based protein sources.

Professional Guidance: The family is open to seeking professional advice from an allergist or a pediatrician to assess Anshu's risk of egg allergy more accurately. They understand the importance of an allergy test, especially considering the family history and Anshu's unique needs.

Food and Drink Dislikes:

Uncertain Allergy to Eggs: Given the family history of egg allergies (father, grandfather, and father's sister), there is a possibility that Anshu might also be allergic to eggs. Although he is currently consuming eggs without any immediate adverse reactions, the family remains cautious. Allergies can sometimes develop or become apparent later in life. The family monitors Anshu closely for any signs of allergic reactions, such as skin rashes, itching, digestive issues, or respiratory problems after consuming eggs.

Observation and Caution: The family's approach involves careful observation whenever Anshu consumes eggs. They may consider limiting his egg intake or conducting an allergy test to determine his sensitivity, especially given the genetic predisposition in the family.

Potential Drug Allergy:

Phenytoin Sensitivity: Anshu's family mentions a concern regarding the drug Phenytoin, a medication commonly used to control seizures. If there is a suspicion or history of Phenytoin allergy or sensitivity in the family, it's crucial to discuss this with Anshu's healthcare provider. An alternative medication might be considered if Phenytoin poses a risk.

Monitoring for Reactions: If Anshu is currently on Phenytoin or if it's being considered as part of his treatment, vigilant monitoring for any adverse reactions is necessary. Signs of drug sensitivity can include skin rashes, fever, changes in liver function, or more severe reactions like Steven-Johnson Syndrome.

General Dietary Precautions:

Avoiding Known Allergens: If any specific food or drug allergies are confirmed, the family will need to take steps to avoid these allergens and have a plan in place for managing accidental exposures.

Consultation with Healthcare Professionals: Regular consultations with Anshu's pediatrician and possibly an allergist will be essential in managing his dietary needs and monitoring for potential allergies.

Emergency Plan: Having an emergency plan, including access to antihistamines or an epinephrine auto-injector (if prescribed), can be crucial, especially if Anshu develops a severe allergic reaction.

Understanding Anshu's World:

Anshu, my younger brother with profound autism, has the cognitive abilities of a 2-year-old child, with an IQ less than 30. His world is vastly different from that of others, shaped uniquely by his condition. Anshu requires constant, 24-hour care, a testament to the depth of his needs and the challenges he faces daily.

Challenges and Behaviors:

Anshu often encounters difficulties that are characteristic of profound autism. These include self-injury, aggression, and complex medical conditions such as epilepsy. These challenges necessitate a level of care and vigilance that is both exhaustive and filled with profound love.

Unlike many others, Anshu doesn't use technology as a tool for communication or entertainment. His interaction with the world around him is more tactile and immediate. There are moments, however, when binaural beats help to relax him, though their effectiveness is not always consistent.

Unique Forms of Expression:

Anshu expresses himself in ways that are unique to his experience of the world. He finds a certain joy and comfort in making sounds, such as banging a glass against the wall or humming rhythmically. These actions, often referred to as 'stimming' (self-stimulatory behavior), are his way of interacting with his environment, coping with sensory overload, or expressing his feelings.

A Beautiful Soul:

In my eyes, Anshu is more than just a statistic or a diagnosis. He is the most beautiful person in the world. His innocence, his unique way of experiencing life, and the sheer purity of his existence are what make him truly special. Anshu's presence has taught me invaluable lessons about patience, unconditional love, and the beauty of seeing the world through a different lens.

To me, Anshu isn't defined by his challenges or his autism; he is defined by the joy he brings, the challenges he overcomes, and the unique perspective he offers. His beauty lies not just in his appearance but in the resilience of his spirit and the strength of our family's bond, forged through our journey with him.

Anshu's diet is carefully managed to ensure it is nutritious and aligns with his health needs. His mom is mindful about limiting his intake of maida (refined flour), which is a common ingredient in many Indian snacks and breads. Maida can be heavy on the stomach and less nutritious compared to whole grains. The exception to this rule is when she makes Chole Bhature, a dish Anshu particularly enjoys.

Chole Bhature Recipe:

For Chole (Chickpeas Curry):

Ingredients:

Chickpeas (Chole): 1 cup, soaked overnight
Onions: 1 medium, finely chopped
Tomatoes: 2 medium, pureed
Garlic: 2 cloves, minced
Ginger: 1-inch piece, minced
Green chillies: 1-2, slit (optional, based on Anshu's tolerance for spice)
Cumin seeds: 1 tsp
Chole masala: 2 tsp
Turmeric powder: ½ tsp
Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
Coriander powder: 1 tsp
Garam masala: ½ tsp
Salt: to taste
Oil: 2 tbsp
Water: as required

Fresh coriander: for garnishing

Instructions:

Heat oil and sauté cumin seeds, onions, ginger, garlic, and green chillies.

Add tomato puree and cook until oil separates.

Stir in spices and salt, then add chickpeas and water.

Cook until chickpeas are soft and the gravy is thick. Garnish with coriander and garam masala.

For Bhature (Fried Bread):

Ingredients:

Maida: 1 cup

Yogurt: 2 tbsp

Baking powder: ¼ tsp

Sugar: a pinch

Salt: a pinch

Oil: for frying

Water: for dough

Instructions:

Combine maida, yogurt, baking powder, sugar, and salt. Add water to knead into a soft dough.

Let the dough rest for 2 hours.

Divide into balls, roll into oval shapes, and deep fry until puffed and golden.

Balancing Taste and Health:

While Chole Bhature is a treat that Anshu enjoys, his mom ensures that such indulgences are balanced with healthier meal options. The dish is made occasionally, keeping in mind Anshu's overall health and dietary needs. This approach highlights the family's commitment to providing Anshu with a diet that is both enjoyable and nutritious, catering to his preferences while maintaining his health.

Daliya for Breakfast:

Anshu's breakfast often includes savory daliya, a dish he enjoys and eats 2-3 times a week.

Daliya, or broken wheat, is a highly nutritious option, rich in fiber and essential nutrients, making it a wholesome choice for Anshu.

Preparation of Savory Daliya:

Anshu's mom prepares the daliya by adding any available vegetables to it, creating a nutritious and flavorful meal.

The vegetables not only add to the nutritional value but also make the dish more appealing in terms of taste and texture.

The daliya is served hot, which Anshu prefers, and he eats it without any fuss or tantrums.

Shared Meals with Family:

Anshu shares these daliya meals with his dad, making breakfast a special time for bonding. This routine also allows his dad to be actively involved in Anshu's daily care.

His dad feeds him breakfast and dinner, while lunch is taken care of by his mom. This division of mealtime responsibilities indicates a collaborative approach in the family to Anshu's care.

Anshu is not big fan of yogurt (dahi). He keeps roaming around the kitchen when he is hungry, he also snatches food from people around him, if they are eatings.

Understanding when he is in pain is quite a challenge. He gets really irritated and starts making a lot of noise, he starts running around and becomes really hyperactive.

Dietary Adjustments for Safety:

Liquid or Soft Foods:

Since Anshu doesn't chew much, his family is cautious about the texture of the food they provide. They avoid hard or dry foods that might be difficult for him to chew and swallow. Foods like khichdi, daliya, and soups are preferred as they are easier for Anshu to eat. These dishes are nutritious and can be easily swallowed, reducing the risk of choking.

Avoiding Dry Fruits:

Initially, dry fruits were a part of Anshu's diet, but given his difficulty with chewing, these have been excluded to ensure his safety.

The family's focus is on providing him with foods that are not only nutritious but also safe and comfortable for him to consume.

Coping with Hot Weather:

Anshu's aversion to hot weather is a significant factor that his family considers, especially during the summer months. The heat tends to make him more hyperactive and irritable, affecting his overall comfort and behavior.

Temperature Control:

To keep Anshu comfortable, the family ensures the living room, where Anshu spends most of his day, is kept cool. They have installed a large air conditioner in this space, recognizing that maintaining a cooler environment is crucial for his well-being.

The air conditioner is kept running throughout the day when temperatures soar, providing a much-needed respite from the heat for Anshu.

Managing Irritation and Self-Injury:

During periods of irritation, possibly exacerbated by the heat, Anshu tends to bite his fingers and clench his teeth, signs of his frustration and discomfort.

The family is attentive to these behaviors, understanding them as indicators that Anshu is feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable. They respond by adjusting the environment to soothe him and alleviate his distress.

Hygiene and Comfort:

Anshu sweats profusely in hot weather, leading his mom to change his clothes twice a day to ensure he remains clean and comfortable.

Additionally, Anshu is given baths twice a day during summer. This not only helps in keeping him clean but also provides relief from the heat, making him feel more relaxed and comfortable.