

FOOD IN CORRELATION WITH CHILD AUTISM: CASE STUDY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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The number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is constantly increasing, based on an etiology of various disorders, starting with prenatal problems and continuing with eating habits and diets. Not all parents understand that ASD comes with a wide range of disorders, including eating disorders. In this sense, it is important to examine the anthropometric characteristics and weight status, inadequate nutritional risks starting from infancy, the diets that are followed later, etc. The purpose of the study was to investigate problems related to autism, starting from etiological factors, food therapy, but also specific diets for complications and intolerances. The research was based on the general hypothesis that nutrition brings major benefits to the general condition of the child with ASD and determines the improvement of compulsive-obsessive behavior, sleep disorders and relationships with others, etc. If the gastrointestinal system does not affect the nervous system, these are the main components of the brain-gut axis. The cross-sectional study was conducted by surveying the parents of 40 children with ASD from the Republic of Moldova, who are part of the "SOS Autism" Public Association.

The questionnaire referred to the prenatal nutrition of the mother and the child from infancy to the age of 3 years and included questions related to dietary complications related to intolerances and allergies. The results confirmed that the male gender is more affected than the female gender, representing a percentage of 60%. 63% of the participants had a normal body mass index, and 18% were overweight and obese, and 19% were underweight. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that cesarean section is a risk factor. 53% of participants were delivered by caesarean section. At the same time, the optimal age to start diversifying the diet of children with ASD is 6 months, just like that of a child without this spectrum of disorders. 57.5% initiated diversification after 6 months. 12% of the children had gluten intolerance, 5% casein allergy and 3% gluten intolerance+casein allergy. The specific carbohydrate diet without dairy is recommended for children with ASD, this was adopted by 15% of the participants, 12% adopted the gluten-free diet, 5% adopted a casein-free diet, and 68% followed no diet. Adherence to meal times is crucial for children with ASD. The consumption of meat, fish and dairy products, mostly, was 2-4 times a week for 52.5% of the participants. Fruits were consumed, mainly 1-2 times a day by 26 participants, and vegetables also 1-2 times a day, by 20 participants. The most common way of cooking food adopted by parents of children with ASD is baking and boiling (95%), followed by steaming (62.5%). A quarter of parents prepare food by frying. The study confirmed that the appropriate diet and avoiding some foods from the daily routine of the child with ASD brings benefits and improves well-being.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder TSA, food, disorders, intolerance.

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