

NEWS

Autism, some say, is all in the gut

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Many cases of autism originate not in the brain, but in the gut, according to a few controversial studies published in the past year.

Stomach upsets are among the most frequent and puzzling symptoms of autism. About 70% of children with autism have gastrointestinal problems throughout their lives, including frequent abdominal pain, constipation and vomiting, compared with 28% of typically developing children, according to a 2006 study¹.

Many parents of these children say that tailored diets ? lacking wheat and gluten, dairy or both ? dramatically improve language skills, or decrease tantrums and hyperactivity, although **few studies have borne out that hypothesis**.

Still, the anecdotal evidence has led some researchers to ask whether the brain and behavioral abnormalities associated with autism ? and perhaps the dramatic rise in autism diagnoses ? stem from problems in the gut.

"We cannot ignore the fact that these children don't just have something wrong with their brain. A lot of them have something wrong with their gut," says **Derrick MacFabe**, director of the Kilee Patchell-Evans Autism Research Group at the University of Western Ontario.