

NEWS

# Gut woes common, but not unique, among children with autism

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Autistic children are more likely to have gastrointestinal (GI) problems than typical children are, but no more so than children with other brain conditions.

About 40 percent of children with any of a variety of developmental conditions have GI troubles such as constipation, abdominal pain and diarrhea, compared with about 25 percent of typical children.

Researchers reported the unpublished results today at the **2019 International Society for Autism Research** annual meeting in Montreal.

“The rates of these GI conditions do appear to be much higher, but across all of these developmental disorders, not specifically just autism alone,” says lead investigator **Thomas Challman**, medical director of the Geisinger Autism and Developmental Medicine Institute in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Estimates of the prevalence of digestive problems in children with autism have **varied wildly**, ranging from 9 percent to more than 90 percent<sup>1</sup>. The new analysis is the largest yet of its type: It involves nearly 47,000 children, including more than 7,000 with autism.

Challman and his colleagues reviewed the medical records of children aged 3 to 18 years from the Geisinger Health System in central Pennsylvania. They looked at records from 7,138 children diagnosed with autism and 16,360 diagnosed with language disorder, cerebral palsy, developmental delay or intellectual disability. They matched these children by age and sex to 23,498 controls.

The researchers then searched the records for mentions of gut-related diagnostic codes, procedures, medications and consultations with specialists.

Children with autism or any of the other conditions are more likely than typical children to have had a gut-related issue: Between 36 percent to nearly 50 percent of children with one of the conditions have gut-related diagnoses, for example, compared with 19 to 28 percent of controls.

Children with one of the other conditions are even more likely than those with autism to have gut problems: Nearly 44 percent have gut-related diagnoses, compared with 39 percent of autistic children.

Among children with autism, those who also have developmental delay or intellectual disability are the most likely to have gut problems.

Challman says he and his colleagues are exploring whether certain types of GI problems or treatments are more common among children with autism than among those with related conditions. "It is possible that there might be differences that are hidden amongst these GI problems," Challman says.

*For more reports from the 2019 International Society for Autism Research annual meeting, [please click here](#).*

**REFERENCES:**

1. Buie T. *et al. Pediatrics* **125**, S1-S18 (2010) [PubMed](#)