

SPOTTED

Spotted: Missing cerebellum; app approach

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Missing cerebellum

Mounting evidence suggests that the cerebellum, a brain region known for its role in motor coordination, plays an **important role in autism**. Now researchers are finding clues about the function of this lumpy lobe in **people who lack it**, according to an article by NPR published 16 March. For example, 33-year-old Jonathan Keleher, who was born without a cerebellum, struggles with abstract thinking.

Asking Ari

An interview with **Ari Ne'eman**, cofounder of the **Autistic Self Advocacy Network**, describes the moment he learned he has autism and the struggles he has faced since. "Like many autistic people, one of the big things that comes up for me is the effort and energy that needs to be expended to act more normal in a nonautistic world," Ne'eman, 27, **told *The Washington Post*** in a Q&A published 13 March. For example, many children with autism are taught that they need to make eye contact to fit in, Ne'eman says, "even if making eye contact is a stressful and anxiety-provoking experience."

App approach

Speaking of eye contact, a new app for Google Glass aims to make it **less stressful and more rewarding** for children with autism. The app, which is being developed by the Cambridge, Massachusetts, startup **Brain Power**, displays enticing images of cartoon characters in the Google

Glass lens when a child makes eye contact with an adult. “We are designing tools to coach children ... to make eye contact, increase connection to those around them, and unleash the potential of their brain,” the company’s founder Ned Sahin told *BetaBoston* in an article published 15 March. Check out other **wearable technology** for tracking and improving behaviors in children with autism.

Promising pathway

Researchers have long known that the high-fat, low-carb ‘ketogenic diet’ helps to alleviate drug-resistant **epilepsy**, but they weren’t sure why. In a study published 20 March in *Science*, researchers took a close look at the **diet’s effect on neurons**. This search led them to a molecule involved in metabolism called lactate dehydrogenase that appears to control brain excitability. Inhibiting this molecule with a drug called stiripentol suppresses seizures in a mouse model of epilepsy. This promising result could lead to new treatments for people with epilepsy, **which often co-occurs with autism**.

Prestigious prize

Randi Hagerman, medical director of the University of California, Davis MIND Institute, has been honored for her work toward **treatments for fragile X syndrome**. Hagerman, who co-founded the **National Fragile X Foundation**, accepted the Sisley-Lejeune Award at a ceremony on 10 March in Paris. She is testing the effects of investigational drugs, such as ganaxolone, mGluR5 antagonists, minocycline and sertraline, in people with the disorder, according to a media statement. She believes the work “leads the way for treatments that may reverse neurobiological abnormalities in autism and many other neurodevelopmental disorders,” she said in the statement.
