

SPOTTED

Spotted: Video therapy; supplement slam

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Home videos

A small study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* suggests that a **video-based therapy may ease autism symptoms** in **'baby sibs'** — infants who have a brother or sister with the disorder and a 20-fold increased risk of developing it themselves. Researchers used home videos to help parents learn and adapt to their baby's style of communication. After five months, the baby sibs were more attentive and socially engaged than baby sibs who didn't get the therapy — a promising result, albeit preliminary. "Targeting the earliest risk markers of autism, such as lack of attention or reduced social interest or engagement, during the first year of life may lessen the development of these symptoms later," lead researcher **Jonathan Green**, professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Manchester in the U.K., **told Reuters**.

Supplement slam

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has reprimanded a supplement manufacturer for suggesting that its capsules and syrups can ward off symptoms of autism. The company, called **NourishLife**,

makes ‘Speak’ — a line of **omega-3**-based supplements touted as treating the communication deficits associated with autism. The FTC ordered the company to alert its customers that the claims “aren’t backed by scientific evidence.” This isn’t the first time a supplement maker has overstepped, but it’s unique in that NourishLife was in cahoots with a now-deactivated website claiming to be an “independent, objective resource for research or other scientific information,” according to **the FTC filing** (h/t **@virginiahughes**).

Tracking technology

Two long articles in *The New Yorker* spotlight new technologies aimed at tracking autism behaviors. One system, called Affectiva, measures “the distribution of wrinkles around an eye, or the furrow of a brow,” to **capture emotional expressions on the face**. The other, called **LENA**, uses **voice recognition software** to track communication between children and caregivers. Both systems are **being tested in children with autism** with hopes that they’ll recognize — and even predict — certain behaviors. We’ve **covered these sorts of technologies before** and will bring you the latest on wearable tech’s promise for autism next week.

Making connections

The National Institutes of Health has launched a **new Down syndrome resource called DS-Connect**, an online registry that links families, researchers and advocacy groups. Clinicians can

use the registry to access de-identified study data and learn more about the needs and characteristics of people with Down syndrome. Some 2,700 families have registered so far — a significant step toward the agency’s goal of 10,000. An estimated 38 percent of people with Down syndrome also **meet the criteria for autism**.

Food as ‘death sentence’

An article in *The New York Times* **takes a sobering look at Prader-Willi syndrome**, an **autism-linked disorder** marked by incessant hunger and **obesity**. “I think the problem with most people’s perception of Prader-Willi is: It’s just a fat kid,” says Peter Girard, whose son Jeremy had the disorder and died from a ruptured stomach after overeating. “They don’t understand that food is a death sentence to these kids.”
