**The Impact of a Nutritional Approach on Autism**

I’m Ann Fowler. I’m the mother of an 18 year old boy, Geraint, who was diagnosed with Classic Kanner’s Autism just before his second birthday. I had him when I was 41 and had never had much to do with children before, as I’d always been busy working, either as a dress designer for private clients or as a costume designer for theatre and television. I believe this was an advantage as I didn’t have any preconceived ideas of what he should be doing, so just relied on instinct and used the same principles as I’d done with my very well-behaved dogs—setting boundaries, sticking to them and being firm but with a lot of love.

Anyway—where does the nutrition bit come in? I’ve always been interested in different types of food, whether from different cultures or different diets such as macrobiotic, vegetarian etc. In 1985, I was diagnosed with IBS which, I believe, was the result of the stress of running my business, working round the clock and having a 10 year mortgage to pay on my own. This varied in its severity, but all the GPs and gastroenterologists wanted to do was give me medication—the condition had nothing to do with food—ridiculous! I looked into and tried different diets, such as an exclusion diet which eliminates lots of foods then reintroduces them one at a time to try and ascertain what’s causing the problem, then there was gluten free, anti candida and so on and so on. So I had a good basic knowledge of how food can affect the body when I started looking into how it relates to autism.

Since Geraint was diagnosed, I have explored and learned as much as I possibly could about Autism—lectures, seminars, conferences—and still it continues. It’s such a fascinating condition. I’ve always been adamant that Geraint eats as healthily as possible, even though his paternal grandparents thought I was being cranky and tried to sabottage my efforts on many occasions. They’re much better now as

And tried to sabotage my efforts on many occasions. They are much better now as they can see the results. Geraint’s dad had never been encouraged to eat properly when he was growing up and was always allowed to eat what he wanted when he wanted. We were told he had Aspergers Syndrome when Geraint was diagnosed in 1994, but he’d been treated for Manic Depression since having a breakdown in 1985. When he had a ‘wobbly’, the first thing that suffered was food. He said it was like stage fright and he couldn’t eat. The only way he knew how to cope with how he felt was alcohol. This and the addition of Prozac, which his psychiatrist insisted he took, led to his death in 1996.

Back to nutrition—I’d heard about biomedical approaches to Autism many years ago, but hadn’t taken that much interest. Biomedical takes into account physiological and nutritional approaches. But listening to people like Donna Williams and Wendy Lawson recounting how different foods affect them led me to attending two conferences on biomedical ways of dealing with Autism. These were organized by the Autism Clinic and were an eye opener. This galvanized my resolve to adopt this approach and take the information I’d learned to other families.

Here are some facts I’ve gathered from the biomedical conferences -

60—70% of people with autism have gut and immune system disorders. This is a very high percentage and doesn’t seem to be recognized let alone explored when a child is diagnosed, although it has such an impact on how their everyday life will be affected. This should be taken into account at the point of diagnosis and every effort should be made to identify the extent of the disorder, so you can—support the gut to be healthy and strengthen the immune system with the use of probiotics etc.

I’ve been asked recently about Gluten and Casein Free diets. It’s actually more complicated than that and an overall picture of the diet and behaviours should be taken into consideration. A good tip though is to look at what food is eaten most often— do they live on bread, cereal, pasta, or is it milk, yoghurt, cheese? If there’s an overwhelming desire for one food, it’s a good indication that it’s giving them a high and should be eliminated.

I’ll give an example of how dairy products affect Geraint. His first summer, he was about 6 months old, he started having rashes on the back of his knees. I put this down to some sort of reaction on his bare skin from putting him down on grass. I later found out, at one of Paul Shattock’s lectures, that three indicators of a problem with dairy were ear infections, red cheeks and rashes behind the knees. Geraint’s rashes were very bad for some time. Now, if he has dairy products it’s like giving him LSD—it’s quite alarming. Even if he has a small amount, he becomes aggressive and starts banging and hitting and kicking out.

Another surprising fact I learned was that 50—75% of people on the Autistic spectrum have cholesterol levels which are way too low. This can have a significant effect on brain function which can lead to severe learning difficulties. The brain is the most fat dense organ in our body . Some children have zero cholesterol and have to be supplemented up to 40 egg yolks a day.. Readings of 2.5—4.14 are a contributory factor in Autism. 5.17 is a good level but should be 6.6 for optimum brain function. This is controversial as the generally accepted medical level is below 5, but doesn’t take into account the type of cholesterol—good or bad—being consumed, which I’m sure Emma will go into later. This information is from a lecture by William Shaw PH D, which I heard at the Biomedical conference last year, but you can see it on Youtube—

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In fact, as I said earlier, the brain is the most cholesterol rich part of the body. If levels are too low, it can lead to depression, suicide, anxiety and interferes with the function of seratonin.

Another mineral which can be too low is Lithium, which can lead, again, to depression and a much higher risk of suicide.

A very important thing to consider, given the high percentage of gut and immune system disorders, is chemical absorption. Consider what you and your family are exposed to—household cleaning products, insecticides, pesticides and many, many more. Think whether you could eliminate as many of these as possible. If the immune system is weak, it can’t possibly deal with all these chemicals which are absorbed into the body and then travel to the brain. I heard, at one of the conferences, that tests have been done and over 200 pollutants have been found in umbilical cords. I met a couple whose 5 year old son has pesticide poisoning and it’s going to take some time to restore him to normal.

There are all sorts of behaviours and characteristics which are accepted as Autistic, but which could have underlying causes and are worth investigating. Here are some :-

A lot of children lean on their tummies on arms of sofas etc. This could be a sign that they are constipated and are in pain. Geraint used to be badly constipated, but good probiotic capsules have made him regular.

A lot of eye touching and rubbing, even trying to pull the eye out could again be pain , caused by a calcium deficiency and liver congestion. Before you rush out and start supplementing with calcium, it is well to remember that you need twice as much magnesium for calcium to absorb properly. I’m sure Emma will go into

this further.

Excessive, unexplained laughing, particularly after a meal, could be a digestive disorder from milk, wheat, candida or lead toxicity.

Head banging or hand biting could be from severe digestive pain, which could be a sign of severe cholesterol deficiency.

Using peripheral vision could be a Vitamin A deficiency. A lack of Vitamin A affects the perception of black and white. There are more receptors for black and white in the outside of the eyes, hence looking sideways.

Tiptoe walking is not necessarily a sensory issue. It could be a nutrient deficiency or it could be oxylate crystals formed in the soles of the feet making it painful to use the whole of the foot. Oxylate crystals can also cause stones in the urinary tract. Vitamin B6 helps prevent oxylate forming.

Another biggie with our children is picky eating. It could be a sensory issue, but, on the other hand, it could be a lack of zinc, which is also prevalent in anorexia and bulimia.

These are just a few examples.

There’s a consultation form you can fill in on the Autism Clinic website and on it is a very useful list of deficiencies and their possible symptoms.

I am also vigilant about reading ingredients if buying anything packaged. A good tip is, if you don’t recognize an ingredient, don’t buy it.

MSG \_ monosodium glutamate—which is used in bucketsfull in Chinese meals as well as many other products and causes all sorts of weird symptoms. I can tell if I’ve had some as my brain feels like it’s ‘fizzling’, which figures, because it destroys the Hypothalamus. This is situated behind the pituitary gland and controls it. It releases many different hormones in an intricate balancing act.

Sodium benzoate is in all sorts of foodstuffs such as fizzy drinks, crisps—it’s amazing what it’s in! It increases hyperactivity and is a major factor in obesity.

Then there are the artificial sweeteners—don’t get me started on them!

Anyway, before I hand you over to Emma, if you’re concerned about cholesterol levels etc, ask your GP for a blood test. We did and they tested for lots of other things. If your baffled by the figures, someone like Emma will be able to interpret them for you.

I’ll now shut up and hand over to her!