Autism Beyond Genetics: The Hidden Factors Every Parent Should Know Transcript

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Autism: Genetics vs. Environment

If your child has autism, you have probably been If your child has autism, you have probably been told one of these two things. told one of these two things.

Either it's genetic and there was nothing I Either it's genetic and there was nothing I could do, or the approach focuses could do, or the approach focuses directly on behavioral therapy and directly on behavioral therapy and symptom management. I'm not symptom management.

Why Environmental Factors Matter

I'm not here to dismiss either of them, but I want to talk about what's often, but I want to talk about what's often missing from that conversation: the missing from that conversation: the environmental factors that contribute to environmental factors that contribute to how autism actually develops how autism actually develops. Factors that are measurable and,. Factors that are measurable and, in many cases, manageable. This is not about in many cases, manageable. This is not about giving false hope or giving false hope or looking for someone to blame. It's about asking looking for someone to blame. It's about asking better questions than better questions than most doctors most doctors currently ask. Before we go deeper, a currently ask. Before we go deeper, a small favor. If you're interested in small favor. If you're interested in root cause integrative medicine that root cause integrative medicine that analyzes what's really driving analyzes what's really driving disease, be sure to disease, be sure to like this video, subscribe to the like this video, subscribe to the channel, and turn on channel, and turn on notifications so you don't miss notifications so you don't miss future content. And if you want future content. And if you want more in-depth information like this, more in-depth information like this, go to my website and subscribe to the go to my website and subscribe to the newsletter. That's where newsletter.

Genetics, Prevalence, and Behavioral Therapy Limits

That's where I share things that I don't always put on I share things that I don't always put on YouTube. When a child is YouTube. When a child is diagnosed with autism, the conversation diagnosed with autism, the conversation usually goes in only one direction: usually goes in only one direction: genetics. There is a susceptibility, genetics. There is a susceptibility, possibly a mutation, and that possibly a mutation, and that becomes the explanation. And there is becomes the explanation. And there is truth in that. Genetic factors truth in that. Genetic factors play a role, but here's the play a role, but here's the problem with stopping there. Genes problem with stopping there. Genes don't change fast enough don't change fast enough to explain what we're to explain what we're seeing. In the 1970s, the seeing. In the 1970s, the prevalence of autism was prevalence of autism was approximately 1 in 2,000.

approximately 1 in 2,000. Today, it's closer to 1 in 36. Today, it's closer to 1 in 36. That's not a genetic story. That That's not a genetic story. That 's an environmental story. Other things 's an environmental story. Other things parents often hear about include parents often hear about include behavioral therapy, ABA, speech therapy, and behavioral therapy, ABA, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. These can be occupational therapy. These can be truly valuable. I'm not truly valuable. I'm not telling anyone to stop, but telling anyone to stop, but behavioral therapy works on the behavioral therapy works on the outcome, the behaviors outcome, the behaviors we can observe. It does not address what is we can observe. It does not address what is happening in the body that is happening in the body that is producing those behaviors in the producing those behaviors in the first place. So, the first place.

Mitochondria, Brain Irritability, and Cumulative Load

So, the most useful question becomes this. What is most useful question becomes this. What is happening

biologically that is affecting happening biologically that is affecting how this child's brain functions? There is a researcher at Harvard,? There is a researcher at Harvard, Dr. Martha Herbert, a Dr. Martha Herbert, a pediatric neurologist who has spent decades pediatric neurologist who has spent decades studying autism. His work has studying autism. His work has changed the way I think about changed the way I think about this. His hypothesis, supported by this. His hypothesis, supported by years of data, is that autism is not years of data, is that autism is not something most something most children are simply born with. It is something that children are simply born with. It is something that developed in response to a developed in response to a cumulative total load of cumulative total load of environmental stressors. His team has followed environmental stressors. His team has followed babies from the womb onwards. What babies from the womb onwards. What they found is surprising. They can they found is surprising. They can observe brain electrical activity observe brain electrical activity, EEG readings, in, EEG readings, in 2-week-old babies and predict which ones 2-week-old babies and predict which ones are more likely to develop are more likely to develop autism by 13 months. The predictor autism by 13 months. The predictor is not a gene. It's brain irritability. How reactive and overstimulated. How reactive and overstimulated is the brain already? And when you is the brain already? And when you ask yourself what makes the developing brain ask yourself what makes the developing brain irritable and irritable and overreactive, the answer always overreactive, the answer always comes back to the same place: the mitochondria. Mitochondria are the. Mitochondria are the energy producers within each cell.

energy producers within each cell. When cells are under stress, they When cells are under stress, they don't function as they should, and don't function as they should, and the brain is especially vulnerable the brain is especially vulnerable because it requires enormous amounts of because it requires enormous amounts of energy. This is what the energy. This is what the research shows. The neural networks research shows. The neural networks most affected in autism are the most affected in autism are the same ones that require the most same ones that require the most mitochondrial energy, and the degree of alteration mitochondrial energy, and the degree of alteration follows the mitochondrial dysfunction.

Key Environmental Stressors

follows the mitochondrial dysfunction. More stress on the mitochondria More stress on the mitochondria means greater disruption in the means greater disruption in the way the brain communicates way the brain communicates with itself. So, what stresses with itself. So, what stresses mitochondria? Many things. And that mitochondria? Many things. And that 's the key idea. It is not a 's the key idea. It is not a single cause, it is the total burden, an single cause, it is the total burden, an accumulation of exposures that accumulation of exposures that push a vulnerable system push a vulnerable system beyond its threshold. Let me explain beyond its threshold. Let me explain the main ones. Heavy metals.

the main ones. Heavy metals. Mercury has been extensively studied Mercury has been extensively studied for its effects on the developing nervous system for its effects on the developing nervous system. Sources include. Sources include certain fish, certain fish, industrial exposure, and old dental fillings. Some children detox. Some children detox efficiently, others don't, and that efficiently, others don't, and that difference matters.

difference matters. Environmental chemicals. Glyphosate, the herbicide Environmental chemicals. Glyphosate, the herbicide in Roundup, is one I pay in Roundup, is one I pay close attention to. It has been linked to close attention to. It has been linked to disruption of disruption of gut bacteria, gut bacteria, nutrient absorption and mitochondrial stress, and nutrient absorption and mitochondrial stress, and is found everywhere in conventionally grown grains, is found everywhere in conventionally grown grains, pulses and processed foods pulses and processed foods.

.. Electromagnetic fields. This topic doesn't Electromagnetic fields.

Gut Health, Detox, and Total Biological Load

This topic doesn't usually come up in most usually come up in most pediatric practices, but some pediatric practices, but some researchers are expressing researchers are expressing concern about concern about wireless radiation and electrical noise, wireless radiation and electrical noise, especially during especially during early brain development. The science in this area early brain development. The science in this area is still evolving, but the is

still evolving, but the interventions are low-risk, interventions are low-risk, which is important. Diet and which is important. Diet and gut health. The gut health. The gut-brain connection in autism is becoming increasingly gut-brain connection in autism is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Many difficult to ignore. Many children have children have significant gastrointestinal symptoms: significant gastrointestinal symptoms: bloating, pain, diarrhea.

bloating, pain, diarrhea. Food sensitivities, Food sensitivities, especially to gluten and casein, especially to gluten and casein, can cause inflammation that affects can cause inflammation that affects brain function. And then there's the brain function. And then there's the most important concept: the most important concept: the total load. No single exhibition total load. No single exhibition tells the whole story. What matters tells the whole story. What matters is the accumulated load on the system. That is why is the accumulated load on the system. That is why two children can have two children can have similar exposures and very similar exposures and very different outcomes. It's not just what they're different outcomes. It's not just what they're exposed to, it's what their bodies can exposed to, it's what their bodies can handle. When I work with families in handle. When I work with families in an integrative context, I treat the child an integrative context, I treat the child as a system. I don't just ask, " What is the diagnosis?" I ask: " What is the total What is the total biological load on this child, and where are biological load on this child, and where are the weak points?" That means the weak points?" That means observing the detoxification. Some observing the detoxification. Some children have genetic variations children have genetic variations that slow down the elimination of that slow down the elimination of toxins. That can be verified. It means toxins. That can be verified. It means observing the intestine. Is there an observing the intestine.

Practical Steps to Reduce Toxic Load

Is there an imbalance, malabsorption, or imbalance, malabsorption, or inflammation? It means observing inflammation? It means observing neuroinflammation. What is neuroinflammation. What is causing it? Toxins, infections, causing it? Toxins, infections, food sensitivities, and this food sensitivities, and this means supporting the mitochondria, means supporting the mitochondria, giving cells what they need giving cells what they need to produce energy, nutrients such as to produce energy, nutrients such as coenzyme Q10, magnesium, B vitamins and coenzyme Q10, magnesium, B vitamins and N-acetylcysteine. I also pay N-acetylcysteine. I also pay attention to the moment. Parents attention to the moment. Parents often notice that symptoms worsen often notice that symptoms worsen after stress, illness, a after stress, illness, a change in diet, or change in diet, or environmental exposure. That's not random. It is the environmental exposure. That's not random. It is the system crossing a threshold. So system crossing a threshold. So what can a father really do?

what can a father really do? Start with the environment, not the child. Clean the space where you sleep.. Clean the space where you sleep. Turn off Wi-Fi at night. Eliminate Turn off Wi-Fi at night. Eliminate unnecessary electronic devices. The unnecessary electronic devices. The brain performs its brain performs its repair work during sleep. Give him the repair work during sleep. Give him the best possible chance. Take the best possible chance. Take the diet seriously. Eliminate diet seriously. Eliminate processed foods, sugars, additives, processed foods, sugars, additives, consider eliminating gluten and consider eliminating gluten and dairy for a trial period, and dairy for a trial period, and observe carefully. Do tests, observe carefully. Do tests, don't guess. Examine heavy metals, don't guess. Examine heavy metals, nutrients, inflammation, and nutrients, inflammation, and bowel function. Standard labs will bowel function. Standard labs will not show most of this.

not show most of this. Reduce the toxic load wherever you can. Reduce the toxic load wherever you can. Filtered water, cleaner food, Filtered water, cleaner food, non-toxic household products.

non-toxic household products.

Closing Advice and Call to Action

Each step reduces the load, and seek Each step reduces the load, and seek support. This is not a quick fix. It's a step-by-step process. The. It's a step-by-step process. The families that do best are those families that do best are those that set their own pace. Autism that set their own pace. Autism is real. The struggle is real. I don't offer is real. The struggle is real. I don't offer simple answers, and anyone who does simple answers, and anyone who does should be carefully analyzed.

should be carefully analyzed. But I've seen what happens when But I've seen what happens when families stop asking, "How do families stop asking, "How do we handle this?" And they begin to ask, "Why is this happening?" "Why is this happening?" The body wants to function properly.

The body wants to function properly. Sometimes, you just need the load to Sometimes, you just need the load to ease enough to give it a ease enough to give it a try. If this raised questions try. If this raised questions about your child's situation, talk about your child's situation, talk to someone who takes the environmental factor seriously to someone who takes the environmental factor seriously. Before you leave, I'd. Before you leave, I'd love to hear from you. What have you been love to hear from you. What have you been told about the cause of autism?

And does any of this change your way And does any of this change your way of thinking about it? Leave a of thinking about it? Leave a comment below. I read each comment below. I read each one of them. And if you found it helpful, please one of them. And if you found it helpful, please share it with another parent who needs to share it with another parent who needs to hear this. Make sure you're hear this. Make sure you're subscribed and watch the next video, subscribed and watch the next video, because there's much more we can because there's much more we can