

Study: Autistic Children Often More Sensitive to Gluten

Source: Food Product Design

Some children with autism—compared to those without—appear to have increased immune sensitivity to gluten in a way that is different from celiac disease; further, the children are also more prone to adverse gastrointestinal symptoms, according to researchers from Columbia University Medical Center. The study results were published online June 18, in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

Children with autism frequently have gastrointestinal symptoms that appear to be linked to the ingestion of gluten. Over the years, diets that exclude gluten have become increasingly popular; but, the effectiveness of these diets have yet to be confirmed.

The study explored the potential link between autism and celiac disease, specifically immune reactivity to gluten. Researchers looked at blood samples and medical records of 140 children, 37 of whom were diagnosed with autism; the others were unaffected siblings and healthy control subjects. The research team found children with autism had significantly higher levels of IgG antibody to gliadin compared to other children; however, there were no differences in levels of IgA, nor in levels of markers specific to celiac disease.

“This is the first study to systematically look at serologic and genetic markers of celiac disease and gluten sensitivity in such well-characterized cohorts of autism patients and controls,” said Peter H. R. Green, MD, director of the Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University Medical Center and one of the study authors. While Green and the team concluded there may be a potential mechanism between the immune response and GI symptoms, further research in larger cohorts is necessary to confirm the findings.

A previous study from 2010, conducted at the University of Rochester, found eliminating gluten and casein from diets from children with autism had no impact on their behavior, sleep or bowel patterns.