



1

Chapter 25

2

A Whole-Body Systems Approach to ASD

3

4

Martha Herbert

AU: Please check?

This should be consistent with chapter 3
where i am listed as Martha R. Herbert

5

INTRODUCTION

6 Although autism is defined at the level of behavior, it is
7 becoming clear that there is much more than behavior
8 impairments to autism. For a long time, the focus of
9 autism research has been on genetics and neurobiol-
10 ogy. The high heritability factor has supported a strong
11 interest in genetics, while the brain basis of behavior,
12 combined with findings documenting brain differences
13 in autism, has supported a neurobiological focus.

14 In recent years, a growing amount of attention has
15 been devoted to a range of somatic features in autism.
16 Prominent among these are disturbances in gastrointesti-
17 nal, immune, and metabolic functioning. Understanding
18 the role these features play in autism is complicated by
19 the fact that they do not present in any one uniform fash-
20 ion, nor are abnormalities in these domains measurable
21 in every autistic individual. While somatic features have
22 often been classified as “secondary” in comparison to the
23 “core” features of autism, this classification is increas-
24 ingly challenged by advances in peer-reviewed scientific

research, and more generally, in our understanding of 25
gut-brain and immune-brain relationships, and of meta- 26
bolic influences on brain functioning. 27

Going forward, it will be important to develop 28
awareness of these whole-body and systems issues in 29
autism, in order both to include them in thorough 30
appreciation and documentation of clinical history, 31
and to more fully appreciate scientific and clinical 32
advances in these autism-relevant domains. 33

EVIDENCE AND RATIONALE FOR 34 LINKING SOMATIC AND SYSTEMIC 35 FEATURES WITH AUTISM 36

Evidence for, and considerations relevant to, whole- 37
body and systems features of autism will be organized 38
around the following propositions: 39

- 1) Biomedical problems are present in many 40
individuals with ASD. 41



- 1 2) Biomedical problems are often related to each
2 other, and also to neurobehavioral problems in
3 autism.
4 3) Common underlying mechanisms may be
5 found in various behavioral and biomedical
6 features of ASD.
7 4) Biomedical problems may begin early in devel-
8 opment, and in many cases may even precede
9 the onset of ASD behavioral features.

10 There is substantial growing support for the first
11 three propositions, but the fourth, while supported
12 by significant anecdotal evidence, has received only
13 limited systematic investigation, which has generally
14 been retrospective and therefore based on medical
15 records and questionnaires, rather than direct and
16 prospective measures. These propositions will be dis-
17 cussed more thoroughly below.

18 **Proposition 1) Biomedical problems are**
19 **present in many individuals with ASD**

20 Evidence for the common presence of biomedical
21 features in autism can be organized into a set
22 of domains; areas to be highlighted here are gastroin-
23 testinal symptoms, disordered sleep, electrophys-
24 iological and seizure abnormalities, immune system
25 abnormalities, and metabolic and other laboratory
26 abnormalities.

27 *Gastrointestinal System*

28 Divergent recruitment and ascertainment methodolo-
29 gies employed to assess the prevalence of gastrointesti-
30 nal problems in ASD have yielded a wide range
31 of prevalence estimates. Several recent publications
32 based on prospective data show that gastrointestinal
33 (GI) problems are more common in autism than in
34 the general population. D'Souza and colleagues
35 (2006) report 80% of their autistic subjects (n=54)
36 had GI complaints, versus 32% of the control group;
37 Valicenti-McDermott and colleagues (2006) report
38 that 70% of their autistic subjects (n=50) had GI com-
39 plaints, versus 28% of controls. Melmed, Schneider,
40 and Fabes (2000) and Levy et al. (2003) report in the
41 range of 50%—a substantial proportion but somewhat
42 lower than the prior two studies. All of these publica-
43 tions drew their subjects from a general population of
44 autistic subjects, without prior selection for previous
45 complaints of GI problems. These numbers conflict
46 with several retrospective reports which place the

47 incidence of GI problems in autism at a much lower
48 level, of 9–18% (Black, Kaye, and Jick, 2002; Taylor
49 et al., 2002). These lower numbers were the yield of
50 retrospective reviews of the patients' histories as
51 recorded by psychiatrists and general practitioners,
52 who may not have pursued signs and symptoms of
53 gastrointestinal illness as they may present them-
54 selves in nonverbal or communicationally impaired
55 autistic individuals who may also have atypical sensory
56 thresholds and pain processing; therefore, these
57 reports are unlikely to be as reliable as prospectively
58 collected data.

59 A range of gastrointestinal disturbances has been
60 reported in ASD. Horvath et al. (1999) performed
61 endoscopic evaluations of the upper GI tract of 36
62 autistic children referred to their clinic because of GI
63 complaints. Evaluations included an EGD (esoph-
64 agogastroduodenoscopy), measurement of small intes-
65 tine and pancreatic enzymes, biopsy samples, and
66 bacterial and fungal cultures. Reflux esophagitis was
67 found in 69.4% of patients. Chronic stomach inflam-
68 mation was found in 42%, and inflammation in the
69 duodenum in 67%. Abnormal carbohydrate digestive
70 enzyme activity was found in 58% of patients. (Horvath
71 & Perman, 2002; Jass, 2005). D'Eufemia et al. (1996),
72 using the lactulose-mannitol test, found abnormal
73 intestinal permeability in 43% of their autistic cohort
74 of 40 patients, versus 0% of controls. Horvath and
75 Perman (2002) found abnormal permeability in 76%
76 of their cohort of autistic children with GI symptoms.
77 Abnormal intestinal microflora colonization has
78 been found in several recent studies, including those
79 by Parracho et al. (2005) and Finegold and col-
80 leagues (Finegold et al., 2002 Song, Liu, and Finegold,
81 2004).

82 *Sleep*

83 Sleep disorders are found in a large majority of chil-
84 dren with ASD—up to 80% (Malow, 2004). Atypical
85 sleep architecture is common in ASD, and may
86 include longer sleep latency, more frequent nocturnal
87 awakenings, lower sleep efficiency, increased duration
88 of stage 1 sleep, decreased non-REM sleep and slow-
89 wave sleep, fewer stage 2 EEG sleep spindles, and a
90 lower number of rapid eye movements during REM
91 sleep than in non-autistic individuals (Honomich,
92 Goodlin-Jones, Burnham, Gaylor, and Anders, 2002;
93 Limoges, Mottron, Bolduc, Berthiaume, Godbout,
94 2005).

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Epilepsy

1
 2 A common accompaniment of autism is epilepsy,
 3 developing in approximately one-third of individuals
 4 with autism. EEG abnormalities are quite common in
 5 ASD, even in individuals who do not have epilepsy,
 6 though the proportion of individuals in whom this
 7 may be documented has varied widely depending
 8 upon study design. Percentages of individuals with
 9 autistic disorder or ASD who have epilepsy have
 10 ranged from 7.4–46%; part of the variability may be
 11 related to the subtype (e.g. presence or absence of
 12 additional neurological disorder; Canitano 2007).
 13 The potential impact of interictal epileptiform abnor-
 14 malities is emerging as an area of active research inter-
 15 est. Such non-epileptic EEG abnormalities are more
 16 likely to be focal than primarily generalized. Autism
 17 may follow infantile spasms, which occur mainly
 18 during the first year of life. Continuous spike-wave
 19 during slow-wave sleep, which can be associated with
 20 language regression, can also be associated with
 21 autism, as well as with cognitive decline. Seizures and
 22 epilepsy are more common among children with
 23 autistic spectrum disorder with language regression,
 24 especially those who experience language regression
 25 after the age of 2 years, and particularly in autistic
 26 children with mental retardation and motor abnor-
 27 malities (Trevathan, 2004).

Abnormal sensory responsiveness

28
 29 There is a high prevalence of abnormal sensory
 30 processing in autism (see Chapter 11). In one study,
 31 out of a sample of 281 children with ASD, 95% exhib-
 32 ited sensory processing dysfunction on the Short
 33 Sensory Profile (Tomchek & Dunn 2007). Abnormal
 34 sensory responsiveness seems to be pervasive in ASD,
 35 affecting all main sensory modalities though not
 36 equally in every individual, as well as multimodal
 37 sensory processing (Leekam, Nieto, Libby, Wing,
 38 Gould, 2007), with severity of sensory processing
 39 dysfunction being correlated with autism severity in
 40 children, though not in adolescents and adults (Kern
 41 et al., 2006).

Autonomic nervous system abnormalities

42
 43 Autonomic nervous system (ANS) disorders have been
 44 documented in autism. Additional autonomic abnor-
 45 malities that have been reported include abnormal

skin conductance, blunted autonomic arousal to 46
 social stimuli, and increased tonic electrodermal 47
 activity (Zimmerman, Connors, & Pardo, 2006) The 48
 frequently encountered sleep disorders, as well as gas- 49
 trointestinal symptoms such as chronic constipation 50
 or diarrhea, may have a major autonomic component. 51
 Atypical autonomic response to mental and physical 52
 tasks has been reported (Goodwin et al. 2006; Ming 53
 et al., 2004, 2005; Toichi & Kamio 2003). Autonomic 54
 hyperarousal appears to be a common feature of 55
 autism, although hypoarousal has also been seen 56
 (Hirstein, Iversen, & Ramachandran, 2001). Abnormal 57
 arousal is likely to be a significant exacerbating factor 58
 in ASD, with contributors to this problem from both 59
 physiological factors (e.g. neurologically based high 60
 or low sensitivity to sensory stimuli), and from anxiety 61
 responses to ineffective coping with stressors. 62

Immune system

63
 64 Reported immune abnormalities have included
 65 autoantibodies (particularly to central nervous system
 66 proteins; Ashwood & Van de Water, 2004b), and
 67 deficits in immune cell subsets, cytokine abnormali-
 68 ties, impaired responses to viral infections, and pro-
 69 longed and recurrent infections (Ashwood & Van de
 70 Water 2004a), activation of the inflammatory response,
 71 (Croonenberghs, Bosmans, Deboutte, Kenis, & Maes,
 72 2002), as well as vulnerability factors, including family
 73 history of autoimmune disease (Comi, Zimmerman,
 74 Frye, Law, Peeden, 1999; Sweeten, Bowyer, Posey,
 75 Halberstadt, McDougle, 2003) and genetic variants
 76 associated with autoimmunity (Ashwood & Van de
 77 Water, 2004b; Torres, Maciulis, & Odell 2001;).
 78 Immune activation has been demonstrated in brain
 79 tissue and CSF (Li et al. 2009; Vargas, Nascimbene,
 80 Krishnan, Zimmerman, Pardo, 2005), and brain-
 81 specific antibodies have been identified in the plasma
 82 of subjects with ASD (Cabanlit, Wills, Goines,
 83 Ashwood, Van de Water, 2007), and associated with
 84 parent report of behavioral regression (Braunschweig
 85 et al. 2008).

Metabolic abnormalities

Mitochondrial abnormalities

86
 87
 88 Features of mitochondrial abnormalities have been
 89 found in autism, including elevated lactic acid,
 90 (Chugani, Sundram, Behen, Lee, Moore, 1999;

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1 Clark-Taylor & Clark-Taylor, 2004; Correia et al.,
 2 2006; Filipek et al. 2003; Filipek, Juranek, Nguyen,
 3 Cummings, Gargus, 2004; Oliveira et al., 2005) and
 4 reduced free and total carnitine (Filipek et al. 2004).
 5 Other features of autism, such as oxidative stress,
 6 can lead to mitochondrial damage and impair mito-
 7 chondrial function (Cadenas & Davies, 2000).
 8 Children with diagnosed mitochondrial disorders fre-
 9 quently present with features of autism (Marin-Garcia,
 10 Ananthakrishnan, Goldenthal, Filiano, Sarnat, 1999).
 11 It is becoming appreciated that metabolic perturba-
 12 tions can be acquired and not only inherited
 13 (Filiano, Goldenthal, Mamourian, Hall, Marin-
 14 Garcia, 2002; Graf et al., 2000; Poling, Frye, Shoffner,
 15 Zimmerman 2006; Zecavati & Spence, 2009).

16 *Inborn errors of metabolism*

17 Autism is associated with a variety of inborn errors
 18 of metabolism, and moreover modulation of autism
 19 severity in some such settings by treatment has been
 20 reviewed (Page, 2000) and further documented.
 21 Autistic symptoms are reduced in PKU by a low
 22 phenylalanine diet (Gillberg & Coleman 2000);
 23 in hyperuricosuric autism by a low-purine diet with
 24 or without allopurinol (Coleman, 1989; Gillberg &
 25 Coleman, 2000; Page & Moseley, 2002); in patients
 26 with low CSF bipterin by bipterin supplementation
 27 (Fernell et al. 1997); in some hypocalcinuric autistic
 28 patients by calcium supplementation (Coleman,
 29 1989); in some patients with lactic acidemia by thia-
 30 mine and/or ketogenic diet (Coleman, 1989); in cere-
 31 bral folate deficiency by folinic acid supplementation
 32 (Bauman, 2006; Moretti et al. 2005); and in Smith-
 33 Lemli-Opitz syndrome by cholesterol treatments
 34 (Aneja & Tierney, 2008; Natowicz 2004).

35 **Proposition 2) Biomedical problems are** 36 **often related to each other and also to** 37 **neurobehavioral problems in autism**

38 Interrelationships have been discussed, both in the
 39 autism literature and in the peer-reviewed scientific
 40 literature more broadly, in multiple combinations of
 41 the above domains.

42 *Gastrointestinal-immune*

43 Many of the reported gastrointestinal abnormalities
 44 are of an immune character, such as altered mucosal

immunity (Ashwood et al. 2003; Ashwood, Anthony,
 45 Torrente,. Wakefield, 2004; Furlano et al. 2001; 46
 Torrente et al. 2002); atypical immune responses to 47
 certain dietary components have also been reported 48
 (Jyonouchi, Geng, Ruby, Reddy, Zimmerman-Bier, 49
 2005a, 2005b; Jyonouchi, Sun, & Itokazu, 2002; 50
 Murch, 2005; Vojdani et al. 2002). The gastrointestinal 51
 tract contains gut-associated lymphoid tissue (GALT), 52
 which constitutes about 70% of the body's immune 53
 system tissue. 54

CNS, GI and immune systems may all interre- 55
 late as well; for example, the neurotransmitter 56
 serotonin, which has been documented in various 57
 ways as abnormal in autism, is prominent in the intes- 58
 tine and may be modulated by immune factors 59
 (Ashwood & Van de Water, 2004a; Barkhudaryan & 60
 Dunn, 1999); this type of multisystem involvement 61
 can be described for other neurotransmitters as 62
 well. An animal model of gut-brain interaction 63
 showed that inflammatory bowel disease activates 64
 areas of the brain implicated in autism (Welch et al. 65
 2005), and in a fashion consistent with an underlying 66
 inflammatory pathophysiology, such as has been doc- 67
 umented in postmortem brains of individuals with 68
 autism (Vargas, Nascimbene, Krishnan, Zimmerman, 69
 Pardo, 2005). 70

71 *CNS immune activation and* 72 *systemic inflammation*

Systemic inflammation may lead to exacerbation of 73
 central nervous system inflammation (Perry, Newman, 74
 & Cunningham 2003); in one study, induction of 75
 TNF-alpha was shown to peak in serum in one hour 76
 and return to normal levels in six hours, and to peak in 77
 the liver in nine hours, but to persist in the brain for 78
 ten months (Qin, et al. 2007). Increased intestinal 79
 permeability has been found even in autistic individu- 80
 als without gastrointestinal symptoms (D'Eufemia 81
 et al. 1996); such permeability has been associated 82
 with endotoxemia, which may render the blood-brain 83
 barrier more permeable (Kowal et al. 2004), and 84
 facilitate the impact of systemic immune altera- 85
 tions on the CNS. The proinflammatory cytokine 86
 profiles reported in the CSF and the peripheral blood 87
 overlapped, in that both showed MCP-1, but much 88
 else did not overlap (Vargas et al., 2005); tumor 89
 necrosis factor-alpha has been found in cerebrospinal 90
 fluid (Chez, Dowling, Patel, Khanna, Kominsky, 91
 2007). 92

1	<i>Immune activation, cytokines and epilepsy</i>	<i>GI and problem behaviors</i>	42
2	There is an extensive literature about the general role	Pain, poor intake, and malabsorption of nutrients	43
3	of immune activation, inflammation, and cytokines in	such as essential fatty acids can be associated with	44
4	modulating seizure thresholds (Vezzani & Granata,	behavioral dysregulation (Garland et al. 2007).	45
5	2005; Vezzani, Moneta, Richichi, Perego, De Simoni,	Inflammatory bowel disease has also been associated	46
6	2004;). However, literature linking immune findings	with neurobehavioral symptomatology (Solmaz,	47
7	with electrophysiological findings in autism is just	Kavuk, & Sayar, 2003).	48
8	emerging (Connolly et al., 2006).		
9	<i>Immune system, infection and sleep</i>	<i>Sleep and neurobehavioral problems</i>	49
10	Immune-brain and brain-immune signaling are well	As compared with good sleepers with ASD, poor	50
11	known to mediate and modulate sleep regulation	sleepers with ASD also had higher scores related to	51
12	(Lorton et al. 2006), with cytokines and endotoxins	affective problems on the Child Behavior Checklist,	52
13	playing a significant role in this mediation. Although	and more problems with reciprocal social interaction	53
14	both immune dysregulation and disordered sleep are	on the ADOS (Malow et al., 2006). Disordered or	54
15	common in autism, their relationship has not been	insufficient sleep can affect cognitive functioning,	55
16	studied.	attention, and information consolidation (Femia &	56
		Hasselmo, 2002).	57
17	<i>GI and sleep</i>	<i>Autonomic disturbance, abnormal</i>	58
18	Gastrointestinal conditions that may occur in ASD	<i>arousal, and problem behaviors</i>	59
19	can be associated with pain which, in turn, disrupts	Literature suggests that many of the behaviors associ-	60
20	sleep. The inflammatory component of GI conditions	ated with ASD are related to arousal, as stressful events	61
21	may contribute through immune modulation of sleep.	frequently precipitate the maladaptive behavior prob-	62
22	This has received little systematic study.	lems seen in this population, such as aggression, self-	63
		injury, tantrums, and destruction of property (Grodin,	64
		Cautela, Prince, & Berryman, 1991). Stereotypic	65
23	<i>GI and oxidative stress</i>	behaviors including echolalia, twirling, rocking, flick-	66
24	Reports of low-antioxidant and anti-inflammatory	ing, and hand-flapping are also found to increase	67
25	nutrient levels in autistic children (Audhya, 2005;	when this population is exposed to events commonly	68
26	Jory, 2005; Yorbik, Sayal, Akay, Akbiyik, & Sohmen,	defined as stressors in the typical population (Howlin,	69
27	2005) suggest a potential self-amplifying feedback	1998; Hutt & Hutt, 1968).	70
28	loop between (possibly inflammation-related) intesti-		
29	nal malabsorption, which exacerbates poor nutritional		
30	status, and low levels of nutrients, which exacerbate	Proposition 3) Common underlying	71
31	inflammation, oxidative stress, and gut disease. These	mechanisms may underlie various	72
32	problems may reduce systemic metabolic resiliency,	behavioral and biomedical features of ASD	73
33	which could make the manifestation of problems	A growing body of empirical evidence, and a number	74
34	more likely in other organ systems.	of models of autism, identify common pathophysiol-	75
		ogical features which can result from various combina-	76
		tions of genetic and environmental interactions,	77
35	<i>Epilepsy and language impairment</i>	and which can manifest in multiple organ systems	78
36	Various epileptic encephalopathies, including	(Chauhan, Chauhan, & Brown, 2009; Herbert, 2009).	79
37	Landau-Kleffner syndrome, are associated with autism		
38	(Tuchman, 2006). However, it does not appear that	<i>Increased excitation/inhibition ratio</i>	80
39	language problems in typical autism can be attrib-	The idea that information-processing problems	81
40	uted to epilepsy or epileptiform changes (Deonna &	in autism may be related to an increased ratio of	82
41	Roulet, 2006).		



1 excitation to inhibition in the central nervous system
 2 has been widely advanced (Levitt, 2005; Rubenstein
 3 & Merzenich, 2003). This model links diverse find-
 4 ings in autism, including sensory issues, arousal issues,
 5 and seizures. It can also result from many different
 6 candidate genes, as well as environmental toxins.
 7 Intriguingly, such mechanisms may not be restricted
 8 to brain. For example, peripheral GABA receptors
 9 are widely distributed in multiple systems, and the
 10 peripheral GABAergic system is implicated in cardio-
 11 vascular disease, lung disease, and intestinal and
 12 endocrine disorders (Akinci & Schofield, 1999;
 13 Gladkevich, Korf, Hakobyan, & Melkonyan, 2006;
 14 Veenman & Gavish, 2006).

15 *Disturbed connectivity*

16 Coordination of brain activation appears to be subop-
 17 timal in autism (Just et al., 2004; see Chapter 21).
 18 Murias and colleagues (2007) have found robust con-
 19 trasting patterns of over- and underconnectivity at dis-
 20 tinct spatial and temporal scales in adult ASD subjects,
 21 in the eyes-closed resting state, when compared to
 22 controls. This altered pattern of information process-
 23 ing may underlie multiple seemingly distinct behav-
 24 ioral impairments, related to impairments of central
 25 coherence (Happé & Frith, 2006) or complex infor-
 26 mation processing (Williams, Goldstein, & Minshew,
 27 2006). Systemic metabolic and immune dysregula-
 28 tion is plausibly pertinent to disordered synaptic and
 29 network functioning (Anderson, Hooker, & Herbert,
 30 2008; Herbert & Anderson, 2008) and long-distance
 31 white-matter connectivity (Herbert, 2005).

32 *Immune dysregulation*

33 As discussed above, this may be systemically pervasive
 34 in distribution and impact. The intriguing report of
 35 transient improvement in core features of autism
 36 in the setting of fever (Curran et al., 2007) could be
 37 consistent with an immune linkage to behavioral
 38 dysregulation.

39 *Methylation*

40 Abnormal levels of metabolites in methionine trans-
 41 methylation and transsulfuration pathways have been
 42 measured in autism (James et al. 2006; Suh, Walsh,
 43 McGinnis, Lewis, Ames, 2008). Methylation is criti-
 44 cal for regulation of gene expression, neurotransmitter

synthesis, and other vital processes. Methylation
 abnormalities have been implicated in numerous
 other neurological disorders as well (Mattson & Shea,
 2003; Muntjewerff et al., 2003; Pogribna et al., 2001;
 Schulz, Lindenau, Seyfried, Dichgans, 2000; Serra
 et al. 2001).

Oxidative stress 51

A growing body of literature has documented oxida-
 tive stress in autism by a variety of measures (Chauhan
 & Chauhan, 2006; James et al., 2006). Oxidative stress
 is found in many other neurological and chronic
 conditions. Redox abnormalities are a final common
 pathway of myriad genetic and environmental stres-
 sors, e.g. methylmercury (Kaur, Aschner, & Syversen,
 2006), tributyltin (Liu et al., 2006), cadmium (Yang
 et al., 2007), and paraquat (Castello, Drechsel, &
 Patel, 2007), to name just a few, and the cell does
 not appear to distinguish sharply between different
 toxicants in its molecular and cellular responses
 (Li et al., 2007).

Energy metabolism 65

Mitochondrial metabolism abnormalities and oxida-
 tive stress can contribute to altered energy metabolism
 in ASD, which has been documented (Chugani et al.,
 1999; Minshew et al., 1993). Network activity in the
 brain can be highly sensitive to mitochondrial func-
 tion (Huchzermeyer et al., 2008)

All of the above metabolic abnormalities are
 consistent with the idea that the neurological distur-
 bances in autism could be a manifestation of systemic
 metabolic dysregulation or disruption (Anderson,
 Hooker, & Herbert 2008; Herbert, 2009; Herbert &
 Anderson, 2008).

**Proposition 4) Biomedical problems
 may begin early in development, may
 have developmental trajectories, and
 in many cases may even precede the
 onset of ASD behavioral features**

This proposition has been investigated through medi-
 cal record review and other retrospective methods in
 the some of the at-risk siblings studies performed
 to date. For example, increased frequency of ear infec-
 tions, greater use of antibiotics, and more illness-
 related fevers have been documented (Niehus & Lord, 88

33 replace the first sentence with
 Reduction in the regulatory cytokine transforming growth factor beta 1 has been
 associated with lower adaptive behaviors and worse behavioral symptoms (Ashwood et
 al., 2008).



2006), and there were more gastrointestinal symptoms in children with ASD and regression, than in children with ASD and no regression (Richler et al., 2006). Prospective measures of head circumference have demonstrated that rapid head growth during the first year of life decelerates in the second year, at the same time as symptoms worsen (Dawson et al., 2007), while one neuroimaging study supports an increased rate of head growth starting around 12 months of age (Hazlett et al. 2005).

The idea that the pathophysiological accompaniments of autism may themselves undergo development, and may interact significantly with the emergence of behavioral features, is only beginning to be investigated. Studies aimed at elucidating physiological development only become conceivable as a worthwhile endeavor once epigenetics and gene-environment interactions are more thoroughly considered as possible contributors to autism. Careful documentation of physiological and behavioral development in autistic cases may contribute significantly to generating new insights about development and vulnerability in autism.

OPEN QUESTIONS IN CONSIDERING WHOLE BODY AND SYSTEMS FEATURES IN AUTISM

There are a number of questions that will need to be addressed going forward to make sense of the relationship between core behavioral features and somatic or systemic features in autism (Bolton, 2009). These include: 1) determining whether somatic and systemic features are secondary or intrinsic to the autism; 2) investigating the relationship between somatic and systemic features of brain structure and function changes; 3) looking for covariations in somatic and behavioral phenotypic features; 4) assessing whether interventions in one domain or level have an impact at other levels—e.g., whether treating gastrointestinal disease can reduce aggression, or whether treating immune function can improve sleep, sensory processing, or epilepsy; and 5) developing animal models that embody not only brain and behavior but also somatic features (MacFabe et al. 2007; Shultz et al., 2008a, 2008b). Including somatic features in phenotyping may also contribute to identifying meaningful subgroups.

If active pathophysiological processes, such as immune dysregulation, turn out to be contributors to

aspects of the behavioral phenotype in autism, this raises a particularly clinically relevant consideration: Are language, communication, and Theory of Mind impairments intrinsic static deficits, and a manifestations of psychologically based lack of motivation, or do they at least in part derive from a physiologically based inability to mobilize cellular activity that is strong or organized enough to drive these functional systems? Insofar as these behaviors may be influenced by somatic physiological status, this raises the possibility that the core “impairments” we see in autism may be the effects at the behavioral level of a pathophysiology based *obstruction* of a capacity that is potentially still at least **partly present**.

To the extent that somatic and systemic features in autism are recognized and considered as worthy of documentation, investigation, and reflection, ongoing research and clinical experience may yield interesting insights into the above questions, and hopefully also an expanded and more comprehensive set of interventions, which will take **these dimensions** of autism more systematically into account.

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61 add comma at end and add the phrase rather than an intrinsic and irretrievable impairment

68 change ... these dimension s... to ...these whole-body dimension s...

Add the following citation to the references: Ashwood P, Enstrom A, Krakowiak P, Hertz-Picciotto I, Hansen RL, Croen LA, Ozonoff S, Pessah IN, and Van de Water J. 2008. Decreased transforming growth factor beta1 in autism: a potential link between immune dysregulation and impairment in clinical behavioral outcomes. *J Neuroimmunol*. 204, no. 1-2: 149-53.

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45-46 delete the capitalized comment and put the word (abstract) in parentheses after 10
 and before the period (with a space between the 10 and the opening parenthesis)

