

## Are Food Allergies Linked to Autism?

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Children with autism are sensitive. Of the thousands of children I have known in thirty years as a doctor, the few hundred with problems in the spectrum related to autism stand out as the most distinctively sensitive of them all. Touching, tasting, hearing, smelling, and seeing involve an enterprise that is not only characterized by difficulties in processing and organization but is also involves a heightened, often painful, sensitivity.

### What does it mean to be sensitive?

We all know what it feels like to have sunburned skin or a reaction to the sound of chalk on a blackboard and we can empathize with children who are involved in a more global sensitivity. But we scientists still do not understand what happens at the cellular or molecular level to change a person's reactivity from normal to sensitive. Even the words we use—hypersensitive, allergic, intolerant, hyper-reactive—do not have precise definitions. Many physicians, however, would quibble if we were to say that autistic children are allergic as opposed to allergic children are sensitive.

