Understanding Autism and Impact on African American Children

April 27, 2013 By Rhonda Peters

Over the years, more people, mainly children, are diagnosed with Autism; and, as a result, raising awareness about it is vitally important to our society. In fact, in March 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a report that concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 88 births in the United States and almost 1 in 54 boys.[1] To add to this data, the expenses that are incurred for families managing autism, are astronomical. Currently, it is estimated that the lifetime cost of caring for a child with autism ranges from $3.5 million to $5 million, and that the United States is facing almost $90 billion annually in costs for autism.[2]

When it comes to African American children diagnosed with Autism, there is limited clinical studies, but some research indicate that they are often times late diagnosed or misdiagnosed in comparison to white children diagnosed with Autism. In fact, many African American children have According to a 2002 study published by David Mandell, assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, “White kids were diagnosed at 6.3 years old, compared with 7.9 years for African American kids.” [3] Other national research indicate that even after diagnosis, some minority families and families with lower incomes or limited education had more difficulty entering the early intervention system.[4]

In an effort to support the autism community, I am joining their efforts and raising awareness about it to my community. I have compiled some basic information about this disorder from the Autism Society website, and I hope that you find it useful.

What is Autism?
Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person’s ability to communicate and interact with others. It is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a “spectrum disorder” that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees.

What causes Autism?
Currently, there is no known single cause of autism. Researchers are investigating a number of theories, including the link between heredity, genetics and medical problems. Research indicates that other factors besides the genetic component are contributing to the rise in increasing

occurrences of autism, such as environmental toxins (e.g., heavy metals such as mercury), which are more prevalent in our current environment than in the past.

Is there a medical test to diagnose Autism?
There are no medical tests for diagnosing autism. An accurate diagnosis must be based on observation of the individual's communication, social interaction, and the quality of his or her activities and interests.

What are the symptoms of Autism?
The characteristic behaviors of autism spectrum disorders may or may not be apparent in infancy (18 to 24 months), but usually become obvious during early childhood (24 months to 6 years). If you notice any of the following behaviors, you should consult your pediatrician--please note that it doesn't mean that the child has autism:

- Does not babble or coo by 12 months
- Does not gesture (point, wave, grasp) by 12 months
- Does not say single words by 16 months
- Does not say two-word phrases on his or her own by 24 months
- Has any loss of any language or social skill at any age

What is Asperger's Syndrome (or Asperger's Disorder)?
Many professionals categorize Asperger's Disorder (AD) as a milder form of autism; some even use the term "high-functioning autism." People with AD experience abnormalities with social interaction and communication skills, as well as experiencing restricted and repetitive interests and behavior. A major difference between autism and Asperger's Disorder is that children with AD do not have delayed speech and typically have good cognitive skills.

Are there any specific resource support for African Americans?
Yes. The following websites offer additional support for families living with loved ones with autism:

- http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/african-americans-and-autism.html
- http://www.thecolorofautism.org/
- http://www.autisminblack.com
- http://www.facebook.com/pages/African-American-Autism-Awareness/209615495736943
- http://www.facebook.com/pages/African-American-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-Awareness/216071281747287

Are there any specific foods to help someone with Autism?
Studies have shown that a good diet that reduces inflammation in the gut can help people with

Autism.[5]

It is recommended that the following foods are eliminated in order to improve the gut: Gluten, casein (from diary products), soy, corn, eggs, and other items that are helpful to consider (sugar and refined oils)

The following is a sample list of foods that will improve the gut: Turmeric, Ginger, garlic, walnuts, ground flax and chia seeds, asparagus, bananas, beans/legumes, honey, non-dairy yogurt, leeks, and peas

[1] “About Autism.” Autism Society. http://www.autism-society.org/about-autism/..

[2] Ibid.

[3] “National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to SRI International and FPG Child Development Institute.” http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/african-americans-and-autism.html.

[4] http://www.autisminblack.com

[5] Matthews, Julie. "Autism Diets and Nutrition. Autism Advocate, 2nd ed. 2010.

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