

Can Vitamins and Supplements Help Decrease Anxiety in Children with Selective Mutism?

By Nancy Kaplan; Mom to Rebecca

Although there are no studies available regarding the impact of nutritional supplements on Selective Mutism, vitamins and supplements have been shown to be effective in treating a number of disorders, including depression and anxiety. Since anti-depressants are widely used in treating SM, good nutrition should be considered an important tool in treating this illness. Persuading a picky eater to consume quantities fish and leafy green vegetables may seem like a daunting task; however, simply providing powerful multi-vitamin and fish oil supplements can help considerably. This is particularly important if your child is a vegetarian.

Here is a brief summary of what I found out while researching nutrition to help my 13-year old daughter. A lot of this information is available on the web, but the facts listed below are sourced from Food & Mood by Elizabeth Somer, M.A., R.D., a book I found to be particularly helpful.

- As consumption of Omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish, flaxseed, walnuts, and wild game) increase, depression rates in the general population decrease.
- Omega-3s might be as critical to the healthy functioning of nerve membranes as they are to arteries.
- Symptoms of minor deficiencies in Vitamin B-6 include confusion and depression, and may cause subtle changes in personality and mood. Such deficiencies are common in the US. (This description of a Vitamin B deficiency made me think of the "Deer in the Headlights" look said by Dr. Shipon-Blum to be common to SM children.)
- Minor deficiencies in B1, B2, niacin, folic acid, B12, C & D may also contribute to depression.
- Inadequate magnesium levels are related to stress (make sure not to give calcium supplements without magnesium, since taking calcium alone can intensify a magnesium deficiency).
- The need for chromium, copper, iron, selenium and zinc also increase during times of stress. These minerals are available in multi-vitamins.

I learned at one of Dr. Shipon-Blum's conferences that there can be many reasons for the development of SM, including neurobiological factors. For example, many children with Selective Mutism have some degree of sensory integration dysfunction. In my efforts to understand what was wrong with Rebecca I read up on various disorders like autism, ADHD, sensory integration dysfunction, anxiety, and depression. I noticed that there was overlap on the trait lists, and that my daughter seemed to have some traits from a few of the lists, including a huge dose of stubbornness. She refused to work with any therapist or to try anti-depressants.

We were at our lowest point as a family when my mother happened to mention how my cousin's child with ADHD had improved when given Omega 3s. I didn't have much else to try, so I immediately bought my first bottle of Omega 3s. After reading more about nutrition I introduced an adult-strength multi vitamin with high vitamin-Bs and a calcium/magnesium/zinc/vitamin D supplement.

While waiting to see an improvement, I did nightly web searches on nutrition, linking the word Omega 3 in turns with key words: ADHD, Autism, Anxiety, and Depression. I was amazed at how much evidence there was that Omega 3 and other supplements could help with these disorders.

Great links: [Mental Health Matter.com](http://www.mental-health-matters.com/disorders/index.php) <http://www.mental-health-matters.com/disorders/index.php> and [PsychoEducation.org](http://www.psychoeducation.org), www.wholehealthmd.com (Good summary of vitamins, minerals and omegas useful in treating anxiety; includes listing of leading food sources and recipes)

Meantime, I started noticing small improvements almost immediately. Rebecca engaged in conversation more easily. She made better eye contact and didn't seem as restless and uncomfortable in social settings. Now that it has been a few months, there has been a dramatic improvement. In the past, so many every day activities were heart-breaking reminders of this intractable problem. There was the ugly scene at the hair dresser, when the beautician angrily complained about Rebecca's "rudeness." I remember standing at the burrito counter where I wondered how Rebecca was going to get through life when she couldn't even tell the counterman which toppings she wanted. Now I treasure small every day miracles:

Rebecca going for a hair cut and actually answering the stylist's questions, ordering in a restaurant, joining in a conversation.

Rebecca is still a quiet child. And I guess I would say she's still a bit quirky. But thanks to vitamins and nutrition, the major crisis has passed. Omega 3s and nutritional approaches are getting a lot of press now in treating different disorders. The information has proved so helpful to us that I want to do my part in passing it along to others.

If you are interested in learning more about nutrition Kelly Dorfman's website (www.kellydorfman.com) may be a good place to start. She is a nutritionist with over 20 years of experience and a long-standing association with SMG-CAN.

I would also suggest speaking to your child's pediatrician about nutritional approaches. At the very least, your pediatrician should review your list of vitamins and supplements to ensure the dosages are safe.

Given the overlap I noticed in trait lists, I also considered contacting doctors associated with Defeat Autism Now (DAN). You can get a list of doctors in your area by contacting the email support group for [Generation Rescue](#), a website dedicated to alternative approaches for treating autism. My contact at this website recommended a book called Children With Starving Brains by Jaquelyn McCandless, which I found helpful.

I hope this information is a helpful start, good luck in starting your nutritional program!