

[IMAGE]

Is There a Processed Foods – Autism Connection?

By Editorial Staff

Two seemingly unrelated health realities are soaring in our society: autism rates and the availability of processed foods. Could the two be connected? Let's look at the research, particularly a new study published in *Scientific Reports*. An acid called propionic acid (PPA) is commonly found in processed foods because it helps inhibit mold growth and prolong shelf life. It also appears to inhibit the production of neurons in the brain and increase production of specific cells that can disrupt neuron connectivity and cause inflammation. Combine reduced neurons, excess inflammation and damaged neuron connections and you have a recipe for communication problems in the brain. These problems, suggest researchers, can result in behaviors seen in autistic children.

These preliminary findings are actually a women's health issue and a pediatric issue, since it's the processed foods pregnant women consume that have a primary impact on the developing fetal brain. However, one can assume that a child, particularly one already prone to autism based on his/her mother's eating habits, could be at higher risk for the condition (or perhaps a more severe form) if the child consumes processed foods during his/her formative years, when the brain is developing millions upon millions of neural connections.

By the way, regardless of the potential autism connection, a growing body of research suggests processed food consumption should be minimized, if not avoided altogether. There's really no upside to eating them except for convenience. And of course, the companies that produce processed foods aren't exactly helping, with a constant stream of advertisements touting their latest processed and ultra-processed products on unsuspecting children and adults.

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