

Finding What Works: Dealing with Autism

When dealing with autism, just as in most other disorders, you will be faced with a number of treatment options for yourself or your child. These include treatments that are educational, behavioral, biomedical, nutritional, and sensory. Unfortunately, for patients who are not affluent or who do not have good medical insurance, the cost of these treatments can be pricier than what they can afford. One way to ensure that you or your child receives the best possible treatment for autism is to carefully monitor the effects a treatment has over time. By finding out which treatments work and which do not, you can stop paying for the ineffective methods and put more of your money into those which are creating a positive difference.

First, evaluate the abilities of the autistic individual before treatment begins. To do this, many services and organizations, including the Autism Research Institute, provide a checklist of evaluation points that focus on behavior and illnesses associated with autism. Autistic individuals tend to have increasing functionality as they mature, so remember that some of the positive effects in his or her life are simply due to the natural growth process. However, after two months fill out the checklist once again and compare it to the first. Are there any sharp positive increases in behavior characteristics? If so, this is more likely due to the treatment.

It is important to begin only one treatment method at a time. If you try everything at once instead, good and bad effects may cancel one another out, or even if the effect is totally positive, you will not know which treatment method is causing it and which are not doing anything. Of course, past studies can help you choose which methods to use, but because autism is an extremely complicated and individual disorder, these studies are not always helpful. Also, some treatments are so new that the studies done are only on short-term effects, which is usually unhelpful. Instead, it is a process of trial and error. Two months is a good amount of time to study the differences within an autistic individual trying a new treatment. After two months, if you do not see positive improvement, you can discontinue your use of that particular method and better invest your money in treatment options that work.

Remember that you do not always have to wait two months to make choices about whether to continue or discontinue a treatment method. If the side effects of a medication, for example, are interfering with the patient's life in an unbearable way, then you should discontinue the treatment. You can also make continual treatments based on immediate good reactions—just remember to continually monitor the various methods. Autistic individuals grow and mature just like everyone else, so treatments may stop working after time. Before

trying anything new, consult your doctor to make sure you are being as safe and healthy as possible.