

# HEALTH REPORT

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## BACTERIA COULD RELIEVE SYMPTOMS OF AUTISM

Researchers are hopeful that results of a new study will show how probiotics can ease the gut problems common amongst those suffering with autism.

According to Glenn Gibson, a researcher from the University of Reading in the UK, children with autism are known to have higher levels of the “bad” bacteria, Clostridia, in their guts. He hopes to prove probiotic food supplements that lower levels of Clostridia will relieve the symptoms of autism.

Gibson is not suggesting that Clostridia causes autism, but that toxic by-products of the bacteria may be absorbed into the blood and travel to the brain, having an adverse effect on health.

Gibson’s team of researchers will study 70 autistic children over a one-year period. Fifty percent of children will receive daily probiotic food supplements, while the others will be given a placebo drink.

Researchers will analyze stool samples once a month in order to study gut flora. They will also assess psychological and physical symptoms.

*Lactobacillus plantarum* 299v is a likely candidate for the clinical trial, as it binds to the gut lining and stimulates its growth. The bacterium overpowers other bacteria and lowers gut pH, which enables the digestive tract to fight infection. This bacterium stays in the gut for several days and is not associated with any health problems.

In addition to treating gut problems of autistic children, probiotics may also help relieve irritable bowel disorder, diarrhea, colitis and bowel cancer.

Probiotics are routinely prescribed in Sweden after surgery to boost immune systems and counter any stomach upsets that are triggered by antibiotics.

*SOURCE: Nature News Service, Science Update, www.nature.com, May 5, 2004.*