

The FDA Warns About Fake Autism Treatments



By Julianna LeMieux — April 17, 2017



The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has updated its '[consumer update](#) ^[1]' this month, which happens to be Autism Awareness month, to bring attention to the useless autism treatments that are targeted towards parents looking to help their children.

First, the FDA is clear in stating that there is NO CURE for autism which makes any treatment claiming to be a cure one thing - a lie.

Next, they provide sound advice to help people have a more skeptical eye when considering one of these treatments.

Their tips for determining treatments to avoid are:

- Be suspicious of products that claim to treat a wide range of diseases.
- Personal testimonials are no substitute for scientific evidence.
- Few diseases or conditions can be treated quickly, so be suspicious of any therapy claimed as a “quick fix.”
- So-called “miracle cures,” which claim scientific breakthroughs or contain secret ingredients, may be a hoax.

In regards to autism, specifically, they call out a few specific treatments that are gaining popularity. They are (taken directly from the website.)

- **“Chelation Therapies.”** These products claim to cleanse the body of toxic chemicals and heavy metals by binding to them and “removing” them from circulation. They come in a number of forms, including sprays, suppositories, capsules, liquid drops and clay baths. FDA-approved chelating agents are approved for specific uses that do not include the treatment or cure of autism, such as the treatment of lead poisoning and iron overload, and are available by prescription only. FDA-approved prescription chelation therapy products should only be

used under professional supervision. Chelating important minerals needed by the body can lead to serious and life-threatening outcomes.

- **Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy.** This involves breathing oxygen in a pressurized chamber and has been cleared by FDA only for certain medical uses, such as treating decompression sickness suffered by divers. (We wrote about this treatment recently [here](#) [2].)
- **Detoxifying Clay Baths.** Added to bath water, these products claim to draw out chemical toxins, pollutants and heavy metals from the body. They are improperly advertised as offering “dramatic improvement” for autism symptoms.
- Various products, including raw camel milk and essential oils. These products have been marketed as a treatment for autism or autism-related symptoms, but have not been proven safe and effective for these advertised uses.

Autism is setting up as a prime area for snake oil salesmen. If you put together the large number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (1 in 68 with a larger amount (4.5 times) of boys diagnosed than girls and the lack of effective treatments available, you have a situation with many people looking for alternatives. But, these alternatives are not based on science and are not only expensive - they are giving false hope to a community that needs engagement and support from the scientific and medical communities - not the emptying of their wallets on sham treatments.

There are evidence-based treatments available - therapies and interventions that have been shown to help with specific symptoms and can support certain challenges that autistic people may have.

In addition, there are different FDA approved drugs that can help with symptoms. For example, the FDA has approved the use of antipsychotics such as risperidone (for patients ages 5 to 16) and aripiprazole (for patients ages 6 to 17) to treat irritability associated with autistic disorder.

If you would like more information on autism, please refer to the [NIH Autism Fact Sheet](#). [3]

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Links

[1] <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm394757.htm>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/09/28/hasnt-jenny-mccarthy-done-enough-damage-already-10225>

[3] <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/Patient-Caregiver-Education/Fact-Sheets/Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-Fact-Sheet>