

Pediatrics TeleECHO

**Medical Co-morbidities in Children
with ASD: Sleep Issues,
Gastrointestinal Issues, Epilepsy, and
Safety**



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Medical Co-morbidities

- Impacts the child's quality of life and functioning as well as the functioning of the entire family
- Will discuss
 - Anticipatory guidance
 - Management strategies for primary care providers

Sleep Disturbance

- Common in children with ASD (50-80%)
- Young children
 - Bedtime resistance
 - Parasomnias
 - Night waking
- Adolescents
 - Delayed sleep onset
 - Shorter sleep duration
 - Daytime sleepiness



Sleep Disturbance

Causes

- Most common: learned behavior
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Restless leg syndrome
- Psychiatric diagnoses – anxiety, ADHD, mood disturbance
- Medical diagnoses – GERD, seizures, asthma, eczema, enuresis
- Screen time



Sleep Disturbance

Treatment

- Sleep hygiene – routine, clear expectations, screen time avoidance
 - Difficult. But, successful when CONSISTENTLY implemented
- If concern for OSA
 - Sleep medicine referral/sleep study
- If concern for restless leg syndrome
 - Labs for iron deficiency and treat if necessary

Sleep Disturbance

Treatment

- Medications

- Melatonin

- Sleep onset
 - 1-3 mg 1-2 hours before bedtime
 - Side effects: nightmares

- Clonidine

- Sleep onset and maintenance
 - 0.025-0.2mg
 - Side effects: hypotension

- Mirtazapine

- Sleep onset and maintenance
 - 3.75-15mg
 - Side effects: increased appetite/weight gain

- Trazodone

- Sleep onset and maintenance
 - 25-200mg
 - Side effects: priapism



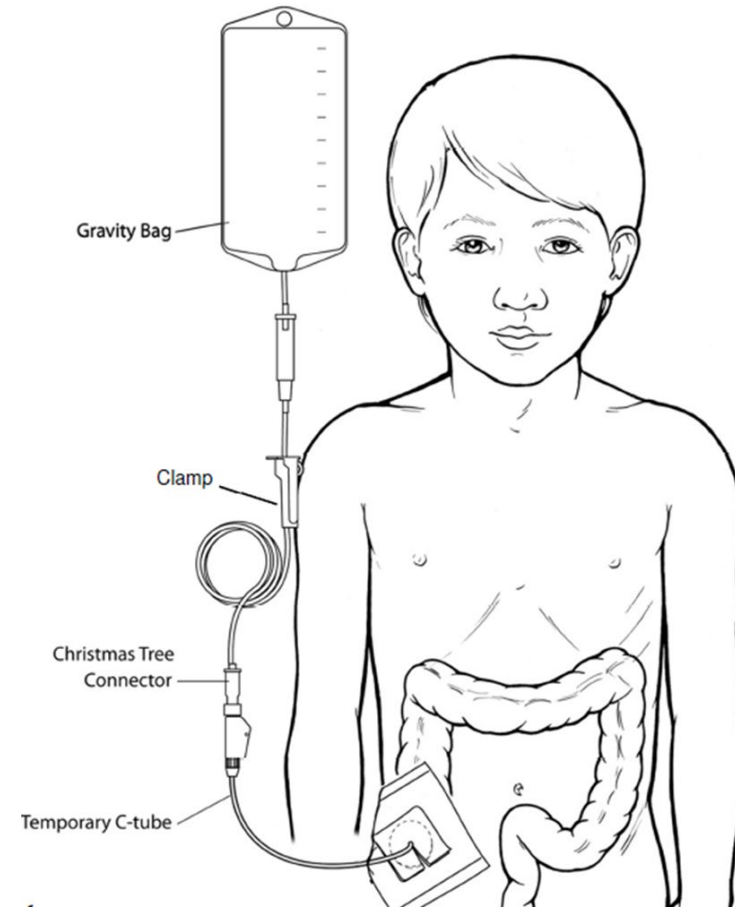
Gastrointestinal Issues



- Increased risk of:
 - Constipation
 - Diarrhea
 - Abdominal pain
 - Feeding problems
- May be less likely to report symptoms (language delay, sensory perception)
 - Consider GI issues when patients are agitated, changes in appetite, sleep disturbance, or other behavioral issues

Gastrointestinal Issues

- Always consider constipation
 - Treat as you normally would
 - Miralax
 - Senna
 - Lactulose
 - May need to consider referral to colorectal surgery
 - Cecostomy/appendicostomy if needed



Overweight and Obesity/Feeding Issues

- Covered in detail by Sydney Abbott, Registered Dietician
- Up to 75% of children with ASD have feeding issues
 - Food selectivity
 - Compulsive eating
 - Rituals around food
 - Pica
 - Rumination
 - Delayed oral motor skills
 - Food refusal

Dental Care

- Unmet dental needs
- Try behavioral intervention first
- May need sedation
 - If sedated – consider labs and vaccines



Seizures/Epilepsy

- Increased risk of seizures in children with ASD (7-23%)
- AND
- Increased risk for ASD in children with epilepsy (6.3%)
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- Among children with ASD, factors that increase seizure likelihood:
 - Intellectual disability
 - Female gender
 - Lower gestational age

Seizures/Epilepsy

- Children with ASD and seizures have higher rates of maladaptive behaviors
 - Independent of cognitive abilities
- Routine EEG is not recommended
- If symptomatic or atypical regression – overnight EEG
- If seizures/epilepsy – treat/refer as you normally would
 - However, may be increased treatment resistance

Safety



Wandering

- Common: 50% of children 4 to 10 were reported as having wandered
- Reasons: Enjoyable, wanting to get somewhere desirable, wanting to escape an activity, intense interest (water)
- Increased risk with co-occurring intellectual disability and more severe ASD
 - Less likely to be able to give parent/caregiver information
- Prevention is key (resources listed at the end)
- Recommend swimming lessons!

Resources

- Autism Treatment Network has many Autism related guidelines for providers. They are all here: [tps://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/autism-related-guidelines-healthcare-providers](https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/autism-related-guidelines-healthcare-providers)
 - ATN practice pathway for insomnia
 - ATN practice pathway on constipation
- Wandering resources:
 - National Autism Association Big Red Safety Toolkit <http://nationalautismassociation.org/docs/BigRedSafetyToolkit.pdf>
 - Autism Speaks Safety Products <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/safety-products>
 - Identification Bracelets or Anklets <https://www.roadid.com> or MedicAlert Bracelets <http://www.medicalert.org/>
 - National Autism Association Safety Resources

Questions?

Thank you!

