

## Fish oil & autism

Maria's son John Paul, was diagnosed as autistic when he was three, plunging his parents into a four-year nightmare. He had both a severe language disorder - unable to say more than two words - and learning disabilities which stopped him from communicating with the outside world. It was a casual chat with another mum from her son's school which led to a new approach in helping John Paul.

"She told me about a programme on ITV about fish oils. As a result I started him on daily Eye Q supplements.

"The fish oil tablets seemed to wake him up and unlock something," she said.

His speech went from a two-word level to seven-word sentences and he's now even reading the Oxford school series. It's the most natural thing in the world for a child to show love for its mother. But Maria Hutchings waited four years for her son just to hug her and say, "I love you."

Maria's son John Paul, was diagnosed as autistic when he was three, plunging his parents into a four-year nightmare. He had both a severe language disorder - unable to say more than two words - and learning disabilities which stopped him from communicating with the outside world.

"It's awful having a child who is physically perfect but can't understand what's going on and is frustrated all the time," the mother-of-four from Benfleet in Essex said.

"You go through phases. Firstly you grieve for the child you have lost - the one you envisaged. Then you think 'I'm going to find the cure and make my child better.'"

But what Maria, 44, didn't know was this quest for a cure would take years and life with John Paul would be a daily struggle.

"He had lots and lots of tantrums and even daily routines were very difficult," she said.

"He likes things in a certain way so if someone wasn't sitting in their usual chair at the dinner table then he would go absolutely ballistic, screaming and crying."

Abandoned by the health authorities

"I used to ask him 'What did you do at school today?' and got nothing in response. As a parent that was devastating. There was no communication. I didn't know when he was ill, or when he was happy or sad."

Even getting John Paul diagnosed - essential for receiving treatment - was an uphill battle.

"You had to fight for a diagnosis and see a consultant. It cost £2,500 for a one-day assessment and again I had to struggle - in the end my GP paid for it."

Maria and husband Stuart, 47, felt abandoned by the health authorities.

"It's a feeling of being left in the wilderness. He hasn't seen a consultant in a hospital for four or five years because as far as they're concerned, there isn't a cure for autism," she said.

However, Maria was determined to find something that would improve John Paul's condition.

"When you love your child so passionately you'll do anything you can to help them."

They tried homeopathy and cranial osteopathy - which encourages the release of tension and helped relax their son for short periods. They also paid £200 to get his hair and urine tested by a nutritionist and spent £80-a-month on the treatments they suggested.

The nutritionist believed John Paul could have a number of allergies and suggested withdrawing citrus fruits while giving replacement vitamin supplements.

"He needed seven, eight, nine supplements a day. We were hiding them in his food but when he worked it out he wouldn't eat anything."

In the end Maria saw that John Paul was becoming depressed and stopped the nutritionist's approach.

"Life is so confusing for them anyway, without withdrawing the food they take comfort from."

Fish oils 'woke him up'

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See how John Paul's drawing improved in a year

"From scribbling in black he painted a rainbow with bright colours. I don't have wallpaper in my hall any more, just all of his pictures.

"I started to see a person coming out. He now wants to know what's going on and is making his own decisions.

"I'd waited four years for him to say 'mummy I love you' and put his arms around me."

He used to be very inert at school, taking out his frustrations at home. But his behaviour changed dramatically: "The first thing people say to me now, is 'isn't he a happy boy'? He never had empathy, but now if he hits out he will turn around and say 'I didn't want to do that mummy, I'm sorry'.

"It's as if he was at last at peace with himself."

Now Maria's whole family is on fish oil. While Maria and Stuart, John Paul, now 11, and her eldest daughter Victoria, 17, take capsules, her youngest two, five-year-old William and Harriet, 3, have bubblegum flavoured sachets.

Victoria saw her GCSE grades rise from predicted Ds to Bs. William, now has the reading age of an eight-year-old, and Harriet can concentrate for 20 minutes while her friends struggle to stay still for even short periods.

Maria is now using her personal experience in coping with John Paul's condition to campaign on behalf of special schools.

Just last year, she stood up to Prime Minister Tony Blair on live television challenging him over recent special school closures.

"Labour wants to mainstream the pupils," she said.

"But they need small classes with specialist teachers. The Government is closing special schools to save money."

Frequent lobbying at the House of Commons has also attracted the attention of Conservative leader David Cameron, who has invited her to be part of an Improvement of Public Services Policy Group.

Meanwhile, her husband is setting up a web-based business about the nutritional discoveries they have made over the years.

"We found that most [pregnant] mothers are deficient in fatty acids needed for brain cell connections," Maria says.

"If they are deficient how can they pass the levels needed for their babies?"

"If just one mother is helped by this work, then it will be worth it."

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-373833/How-fish-oil-unlocked-autistic-son.html>