

Be Aware of Potentially Dangerous Products and Therapies that Claim to Treat Autism



<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/be-aware-potentially-dangerous-products-and-therapies-claim-treat-autism>

Español (</consumers/articulos-en-espanol/autismo-cuidado-con-las-terapias-y-los-productos-potencialmente-peligrosos>)

Products or treatments claiming to cure autism are deceptive and misleading, because there is no cure for autism. The same is true of many products claiming to “treat” autism or autism-related symptoms. Some may carry significant health risks.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plays an important role in warning companies against making improper claims about their products’ intended use as a treatment or cure for autism or autism-related symptoms.

About Autism

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 1 in 68 children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Autism spans all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and is about 4 times more common among boys (1 in 42) than among girls (1 in 189).

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) describe children with autism as having difficulties with social interaction, displaying problems with verbal and nonverbal communication,

exhibiting repetitive behaviors and having narrow, obsessive interests. These behaviors can range in impact from mild to disabling. Some children with ASD are very high functioning, while others may have significant delays in cognition and development.

Because there can be overlap in symptoms between ASD and other disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), it's important that the treatment focus on a person's specific needs. Existing behavioral interventions are designed to address specific symptoms, particularly communication issues, and can bring about improvement. Early intervention is key.

There are FDA-approved drugs that can help some people manage related symptoms of ASD. 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. Before using any behavioral intervention or drug therapy that claims to treat or cure autism, you should check with your health care professional.

FDA Cracks Down on False Claims

The Food and Drug Administration has warned and/or taken action against a number of companies that have made improper claims about their products' intended use as a treatment or cure for autism or autism-related symptoms. Some of these so-called therapies carry significant health risks. For example,

- **“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.
- **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, MMS (chlorine dioxide) 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.

FDA some quick tips to help you identify false or misleading claims.

- 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, are likely a hoax.

If you have a question about treatment, talk to a health care provider who specializes in caring for people with ASD.

The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/autism/conditioninfo/treatments>) has more information about therapies and interventions for ASD, as does the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/treatment.html>).