



Healthy  
**Pregnancy**  
SUMMIT



**Debby Hamilton,  
MD, MSPH**

## Reducing The Risk Of Autism And ADHD

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

important, autism, adhd, women, child, medicines, debby, pregnancy, exposure, preconception, cosmetics, prenatal, iron, thyroid issues, mom, healthy, rates, toxins, increased risk, microbiome

00:00

Welcome to our session on preventing autism and ADHD. I'm Professor James Adams, and with me is Dr. Debby Hamilton is an expert on this subject. And she's actually written a book on preventing autism and ADHD.

00:14

Welcome, Debby. How thank you very much for having me here today.

00:20

Debby, also a little bit more about your background and your experience with autism and ADHD and counseling women about how to prevent those problems.

00:30

Sure, so I'm an integrated pediatrician. And for the last 15 years, I've been I've integrated practice. And half of my practice is people who want a more integrative or holistic approach to pediatrics. And then I also see kids with chronic issues like autism and ADHD. And I started to look at both these families and the diet and environment and kind of sum the whole History of the mom and the health of a mom. And I saw some differences, like, well, maybe this impacts



the risk of having a child autism, ADHD. And then I started to have moms who had one child with autism or ADHD and like, you know, I'm thinking about having another child, is there anything I can do to prevent this? And so I started looking at this. And I looked at over 600 references, and I put together a book called preventing autism and ADHD, controlling risk factors before, during and after pregnancy. And the more I looked, the more I found that having a healthy mom, and really looking at preconception was probably one of the most important things that you can do. And that's how I came to kind of combine preconception counseling and preconception workshops into my practice with a goal of helping women have a healthy baby.

01:56

Right. It's so difficult to treat autism so difficult to treat ADHD it's so much better if we can prevent it from even occurring. Overall, what are the rates of autism and the rates of ADHD today?

02:09

the rates of autism and ADHD are increasing. Basically every two years, we find an increase rate. In the span of writing the book, I had to change my statistics twice, from how many kids have autism. So it's one in 59 children in United States. When I started, I think it was one and 100. So the rates are really increasing. for ADHD. It's roughly around 9 to 10% of kids in the United States. And autism and ADHD don't affect girls and boys the same. There's much higher rates of autism and ADHD in boys, which is also something you need to look out.

02:50

For those boys are seem to be much more vulnerable to right issues including autism and ADHD. If a couple already has a child with autism or ADHD Are the future children at increased risk of those conditions?

03:04

Yes, that is something that we have found. So if a family has one child with autism, the rate is about 18%. For having another child with autism, we don't know the rates for ADHD. But what we do see in practice is they do have increased risk of ADHD. I often find if a family has one child with autism, they may have another child with ADHD, because there's some similarities in that spectrum. Since boys are affected more than if you have a boy as a second child, they have a higher risk of autism than N2 percent. So really something to think about, especially if you have a child really preparing for the next job because they will be at increased risk.

03:49

Right and even if they don't have autism or ADHD, they may have speech delays or other



problems as well. Those are certainly more common. So what are some of the major risk factors for autism? In the ADHD that people should be aware of, and to try to address.

04:05

Well, as we said, having one child is a definitely an increased risk of having another child. But some of the mom's health, certain things a month health really can make a difference. exposure to pesticides and pesticides, thinking about actually on our food, things like glyphosate that are on our food increases your risk of having a child with autism or ADHD. So other exposures like heavy metals, like lead and mercury can increase your risk. Mom's health including things like if her irons low she has an increased risk for vitamin D is low, these are really important and these are things you can address before conception. Even I see a lot of moms who have autoimmune disease, or have digestive issues or have kind of chronic health issues, you know themselves is something to look at. If A woman is exposed to different infections, things like influenza, or measles and rubella. She has an increased risk of a child with autism and ADHD. So there are multiple things that can affect it. And probably a lot of things we don't know. Or pregnancy complications like preterm birth, if you have a really, you know, a set of premature babies, especially if they're really premature, then that increases the risk of autism and ADHD. And that go back goes back to the healthy mom, healthy mom is going to have a healthier pregnancy. And so healthy delivery, and that's going to help her child also be healthier.

05:40

So what are some of the things that a woman can do before conception? That might decrease your risk of having a child with autism or ADHD?

05:50

Well, I think one of the most important things is to have a preconception visit. To look at her diet. Try to get an organic diet. Look at her water. Look at her toxic exposures. Look at her medicines. You know, look at her overall health. I think these are really important. And again, are looking at nutritional things like getting her iron levels done getting vitamin D, some really basic things, things like homocysteine to look at, you know, does she have adequate folates and B 12? Some of our very important B vitamins. So I think I said the preconception visit and getting healthy before pregnancy is one of the best things she can do.

06:33

Yeah, I think especially the folates are important. I've seen studies suggesting that you can decrease your risk 40% or more with folate and then if you add in B 12, it's probably a 50% or greater decrease risks. I think those are very important. And low iron as well, as you were mentioning can double your risk of having a child with autism. So these are very important



issues that can be addressed prenatally. preconception And also you mentioned the idea of having a good nutrition workout. So seeing a nutritionist before they conceive, I think is also a great idea. What about any medical tests of the mother or father should be done before conception?

07:15

Yeah, well, some of this, I think thyroid health and we're seeing a lot more thyroid issues. I think part of that is because of our the toxins and environment and also infections. So having adequate thyroid test is important getting her thyroid levels. We see a lot I've seen a lot of a lot more thyroid issues in especially children with autism. And I often find a family history and a mom's history of thyroid issues. So I think that that needs to be part of it generous for me. iron levels, vitamin D levels. homocysteine levels are very important if they're elevated that shows that the mom for some of our B vitamins like refold rates are low. RBC folate is a better test and that's can be added to, but I don't think you'd definitely make sure you have a homocysteine. So those are some kind of some basic things, liver, kidney function, just general health. I think those are all very basic and all things that any doctor can order. So they're not special test some basic things that everyone can do.

08:20

And so we've been talking mostly about what women can do before they conceive to get as healthy as possible. Once they are pregnant, should they be continuing those? And is there anything else they can do to decrease the risk of having a child with autism or ADHD?

08:36

Well, I think, you know, is that optimizing your health before a prenatal supplement before conception is a great idea. And looking at healthy not all prenatal supplements are the same. The neurological Health Foundation does have a list of the prenats because you want to have adequate levels of things like calcium and iron. You want to have forms of the vitamins that your body can use. So a good quality prenatal is one of the most important things you can do. I think omega three fats are important. I think people are learning more and more about the microbiome, where a baby going through a normal delivery, actually get some of the microbiome, some of those good bacteria. So establishes the microbiome in birth, and that's really important for the immune system. So again, I think there's some prenatal supplements that are really really important for her to do. And then of course, obviously, looking at her environment looking at her cosmetics I think, you know, it's there's estimates of how many different products that an average woman uses, but can be a lot of multiple exposures. Environmental Working Group has a great list of an array of the safety of the different cosmetics that's easy online resource, organic foods, toxin the environment, what used to clean your



house, you know, different pesticide exposure on your lawn. Work exposures. So I think there's a lot of things that we can do

10:04

to just trying to overall decrease environmental exposure to having clean water, clean food, clean air. Important to there have clean air, you want to talk about that a little bit

10:17

of indoor air pollution. If you think about you breathe in this toxins, you don't even think about it. So having a good hibbett air filter is important. Opening your windows opening your doors. I think everybody should get outside every day, just to breathe some fresh air. Obviously not not everybody has exposure to that and I worry about some people and in you know, big cities and that exposure, but if you think about ways that toxins get in the body, they get through the skin cosmetics, he breathed them into the air. You know, you ingest them from your water and your food. So again, just being aware of the different you know, ways you might be exposed to different toxins

10:59

are there any medications that are potential risk factors that women should be aware of, and discuss with their physicians.

11:06

I think as I said, we have a preconception visit. I think any medicine is important. But there are some medicines that are associated with increased risk of autism. I think of anti seizure medicines as something that's, you know, important. Some anti seizure medicines are now used as anti depressants. Many more women are on antidepressants, and anti anxiety medicines. And you really need to discuss like the risk benefits of this with your doctor. And certain medicines. Certain antidepressants are much safer and have been studied, or other words seem to be more a problem. And babies can actually have to withdraw from these medicines. And people need to be aware of that also. But again, thyroid medicines, any kind of blood pressure medicines, really any prescription is important, and things like herbs and stuff. supplements, there are certain herbs that you really should not take during pregnancy, especially early on in pregnancy. So you really need to have to know what you're taking completely more and more people are taking herbs and supplements and I recommend them often as part of what I do in nutrition. But during pregnancy, you have to be very, very careful of what you consume.

12:23

And then also, what about the importance of exercise for just improving increasing blood flow to



increase oxygen to the body in the brain? And also to relieve stress? What are your thoughts on exercise?

12:34

I think pregnancy, I think exercise for everyone. I think it's important. But you know, I live in Colorado and the idea of exercise can be a little extreme. So I think moderate exercise is really important. Not too little and not too much. You know, you don't need to go run a marathon. But getting outside of your day, getting a walk. I think Yoga is Wonderful because you get to stretch and you still get to strengthen. So and it does relieve stress. It actually is also one of the best things you can do for depression. So women who are suffering from depression and mood issues, I think that that's an excellent thing to do to get into a normal, normal routine with

13:19

what's probably covered a lot of topics and I think the important message to get across is that we can reduce the rates of autism and ADHD. We know what many of the risk factors are. One of the biggest factors is starting folic starting fully prior to pregnancy, and also getting adequate b 12. Without getting enough iron. So those are some of the important topics we covered. Is there anything else you want to emphasize as we close?

13:48

I think the most important thing is thinking about preconception. Thinking about a healthy mom. If you have a healthy mom, good nutrition. You know, do you crease exposures, taking her prenatals you know, doing a moderate exercise some basic things that are really good recommendations for all people. But a healthy mom leads to healthy pregnancy, which leads to healthy baby. And I think if we think that way, we basically can really help, you know, decrease the risk of water really rising chronic health issues in our children.

14:24

Great, I think those are very important points. Well, thank you very much, Debby, for joining us and for this very informative interview. Yes, well,

14:31

thank you for inviting me today.

