



## Doctor's Message: Autism Is Treatable

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PONTE VEDRA BEACH, FL -- It's an unassuming pediatrics office on a quiet street, blending into this lush, affluent coastal community.

Outside on the front lawn, children are frolicking and rolling on the grass. Laughing. Engaged in play. They seem like any other neighborhood kids.

One of them is the pediatrician's daughter, Dani. Her bubbly, effusive personality would make any mom burst with pride.

"I don't like being sick, I like being unsick!" she informs me, her diction crisp, her eyes clear.

For Dr. Julie Buckley, six-year-old Dani's behavior is nothing short of a miracle.

"She went away," says the brisk, efficient pediatrician with the large brown eyes and husky voice. "She was gone. And getting her back is the most rewarding and important thing I've ever done.

"As a mom, or as a physician."

Dani is a child recovering from autism, a complex neurodevelopmental disorder marked by a child's inability to communicate. Autistic kids also tend to have horrible gastrointestinal problems, and major immunological deficiencies.

Dr. Buckley believes her daughter's immune system was harmed, in part, by thimerosal, the mercury-based preservative that was used until recently to store childhood vaccines in multi-dose vials.

The MMR, or measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, added on top of the mercury exposure, simply "blew her up" gastrointestinally, Buckley says.

"At one point, her measles and mumps titers were so elevated, the Health Department was concerned she had active disease! She didn't. Her body simply just couldn't handle it."

The theory is hotly contested, and a thimerosal-autism connection is disputed by government officials and many scientists. The MMR issue is also controversial, because most pediatricians feel the benefits of being protected against measles, mumps and rubella far outweigh the risks it may carry for some children who have trouble with absorbing three live viruses at once.

But some clinical studies suggest that mercury, in the words of University of

Kentucky researcher Boyd Haley, may be the "trigger" that tipped genetically vulnerable children into the abyss of autism - especially those who got 187 micrograms of mercury from vaccines during the first six months of life.

Buckley subscribes to the premise that autism may be caused by a genetic predisposition triggered by heavy metal or pesticide exposure, that in turn, damages metabolic pathways.

And she's had remarkable success in treating children along the autism spectrum, her own daughter included.

"At her worst, she gave new meaning to the term 'meltdown,'" says Buckley. "She was ENDLESSLY sick. Just endlessly. She had tubes in her ears for weeks. Sinus surgery. Constant infections."

Buckley investigated treatment options, determined to recover her daughter. They worked.

"The fog lifted, and I had a little girl back again."

How'd the good doctor do it? By employing a variety of treatments, some established, some more unconventional - and controversial.

First and foremost, Buckley says Dani benefited from a gluten- and casein-free diet. In other words, she eats no wheat gluten, and no dairy products. Autism specialists believe children with the disorder have trouble digesting the proteins in gluten and casein, and that in fact, the foods have an almost narcotic-like effect on their brain chemistry, exacerbating their difficulties.

"Dani was a different child three days into a gluten-free, casein-free diet. It was just amazing."

Also part of Dani's regimen - IVIG, which stands for "intravenous immune globulin." The gamma globulin IV drip, which contains simple proteins that provide immunity against disease, goes into Dani's stomach twice a month.

"I'm not scared!" the child says with a grin as the nurse administers the medicine.

IVIG, says Buckley, is food and drink to Dani's compromised immune system.

"A week after her first IVIG, she looked at me and told me she loved me for the first time in her life."

There's more. Dani receives many supplements, as Buckley's other autistic patients do, along with behavioral therapy.

But by far the most controversial treatment for autism is chelation therapy. Chelation essentially strips the body of heavy metals - like mercury.

According to Buckley, "It has one of the most stupendous improvement outcomes of any of the treatments that we use for our children."

But chelation also removes other necessary metals, like iron and zinc, from the

patient's system, and can sometimes cause serious side effects. Only one chelation treatment, DMSA, is currently FDA-approved.

However, as the Wall Street Journal recently reported, toxicologist Rashid A. Buttar recently told a congressional subcommittee that more than half of his patients undergoing chelation had a complete loss of their autistic symptoms.

It's a hopeful message, one that Dr. Buckley echoes as she sits with her arms around Dani on the front steps of the unassuming pediatrics office.

"Are you gonna get married someday, Dani?" she whispers into her daughter's ear.

The child nods confidently. "Yeah."

"Gonna have babies?" "Yeah."

The message, says Buckley, is that autism is treatable. "A year ago, I didn't even know if she'd ever have an independent life, if she'd ever get married, if she'd ever have children."

"Now - I'm working for wedding invitations."

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