Is there evidence for an association between autism and allergies?

At this point, there is no clinical evidence to support an association between autism and allergies. However, numerous studies have analysed the rates of autism and allergies across various populations. The data from these prevalence studies show that the rates of asthma and of atopic rhinitis are higher amongst children who have an autism spectrum disorder compared to the rates in children without autism. The most recent review of these prevalence studies reports that compared with children who do not have autism, children with ASD are 69% more likely to have asthma and 66% more likely to have atopic rhinitis (Miyasaki et al. 2015).

A synthesis of the data reported by these prevalence studies also shows that there is no significant difference in the rates of food allergies or atopic dermatitis for children with autism compared to other children. These results indicate evidence that children on the autism spectrum could be more susceptible to a particular type of allergy rather than being susceptible to allergies in general. There is no clear evidence for the reasons for the higher rates of asthma and atopic rhinitis observed in children on the autism spectrum. Researchers have suggested that psychological stress, which is commonly observed in children with autism, could possibly be one of the key factors in the association between autism and these allergies, as stress is known to play a significant role in the functioning of the immune system.

References