Herbal Remedy for Autism Shows Promise

By Deborah Mitchell G+ June 30, 2013 - 6:10am for eMaxHealth

Children who have autism or other types of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) often have behavioral problems, such as irritability, tantrums, and aggression. Results of a new study from Japan suggest an herbal remedy may help relieve these behavioral challenges in children and adolescents.

What is in the herbal remedy?

The herbal remedy used in the study is called yokukansan, which is a combination of seven different traditional Japanese herbs. Several of the herbs are likely unfamiliar to Western populations.

- Atractylodes lancea rhizome, which has been used traditionally for gastrointestinal disorders
- Poria sclerotium, a Chinese mushroom traditionally used to treat memory loss, anxiety, tension, nervousness, dizziness, and insomnia
- Cnidium rhizome, traditionally used for rashes and libido
- Uncaria, a genus that includes cat’s claw (Uncaria tomentosa) and other species that are used medicinally to fight inflammation and anxiety
- Angelica root, which is used to treat heartburn, nervousness, insomnia, and loss of appetite
- Bupleurum root, an herb typically used to treat respiratory disorders, insomnia, digestive disorders, and depression
- Glycyrrhiza, also known as licorice, usually used to treat digestive disorders and along with bupleurum for adrenal gland problems

The study involved administering yokukansan (2.5 to 7.5 grams daily) to 20 young people ages 6 to 17 years who had been diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder. This herbal remedy has been indicated for treatment of behavioral and psychological symptoms of individuals with dementia, but in this study the investigators explored its benefits for young people with PDD over a 12-week period.

Investigators evaluated the participants using various testing measures, including the Clinical Global Impressions-Improvement of Illness Scale, Children’s Global Assessment Score, and the Aberrant Behavior Checklist, which looks at irritability. The study’s authors found that use of yokukansan was well tolerated and significantly improved irritation and agitation by 8 weeks and hyperactivity by 12 weeks.

The findings suggest the Japanese herbal remedy is helpful in alleviating symptoms of autism and PDD. Additional research is needed to determine if this herbal remedy is truly effective.
Other treatment options for autism

Autism and other PDD conditions are a challenge to treat, and parents need to investigate and evaluate the available options. A recent study in Yale Child Study Center, for example, found that a behavioral program called Pivotal Response Treatment may help individuals who start the program as young as less than 2 years old. Most autism programs begin when children are at least 3 years old.

Other research of autism has found that modifying a child’s diet may have a beneficial impact. At the 2010 Pediatric Academic Societies annual meeting by the Autism Speaks’ Autism Treatment Network, researchers announced that 17 percent of the 1,212 children in the study were on special diets (gluten-free, casein-free). The authors announced that their study results “suggest that dietary intervention may positively affect developmental outcome for some children diagnosed with ASD” (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

In the journal Nutritional Neuroscience, researchers reported on a 24-month trial that included 72 children who had ASD. At the end of the two-year study, the investigators noted that “dietary intervention [with a gluten- or casein-free diet] may positively affect developmental outcome for some children diagnosed with ASD.” A new study from Columbia University has suggested that gluten may exacerbate ASD symptoms.

Research has also indicated that administration of a diuretic (bumetinide) resulted in improvement in 75 percent of young patients with ASD. Among the improvements were a significant difference in behavior and a modest improvement in communication, social interaction, and imagination.

In a subset of children with ASD and epilepsy, research has suggested a supplement may offer some benefit. The study, which appeared in the journal Science, noted that branched chain amino acids may help some of these children.

Investigations into potential effective treatments for autism and other types of pervasive developmental disorders continue around the globe. Further research is necessary to better identify the value of this herbal remedy for autism.

http://www.emaxhealth.com/1275/herbal-remedy-autism-shows-promise

SOURCES:
Novarino G et al. Mutations in BCKD-kinase lead to a potentially treatable form of autism with epilepsy. Science 2012 Sept 6 online. doi:10.1126/science.1224631