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How we Dealt with Autism Naturally

Kathleen DiChiara

This magazine was created to educate others on the various ways of living a happy, healthy, natural lifestyle. Living a natural lifestyle means making a concise choice about the food we eat, the way we deal with physical and mental health problems, and what we expose our families to within our living space. This magazine is for those who seek to improve their quality of life because "It's Your Life" live it to the fullest.

Dealing With Autism Naturally: Interview with Kathleen DiChiara

Joyce Wheeler

Thank you Kathleen for allowing me to share your story with our readers. I am sure there are a lot of families out there who would love to hear about how you were able to help your son with autism naturally.

As you know as of 2014 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 1 in every 68 children is effected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD.) These numbers have increased over the years and continue to. Many families are dealing with a child or children with ASD with doctors telling them there is nothing they can do. However, I have heard of a number of families whose children have either been cured or the symptoms greatly reduced through natural remedies. A search for such a family to interview led me to you and I am both thankful and honored that you are willing to share this intimate family situation with others.



Joyce: At what age did you realize there was a problem with your son?

Kathleen: Stephen was born 3 ½ weeks early (I was induced because his heart rate was dropping in utero) and had difficult time latching to breastfeed. He had jaundice and was colic for the first four months of life, which was just the beginning of what would soon be a long list of symptoms that indicated he was struggling more than he should. He went on to miss all of his developmental milestones and was still non-verbal by three years of age. In fact, by the time Stephen was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-nos), an autism spectrum disorder, he has seven other diagnostic labels - including sensory integration disorder, mixed receptive-expressive language disorder, motor planning disorder, articulation delay, cognitive delay (slow processing speed), selective mutism and social phobia.

At one point, it seemed like every visit to a specialist, he was assigned a new label that described a set of symptoms. It wasn't long before these all added up to the complex neurodevelopmental disorder we know as autism. I can still recall the day a well-respected neurologist told my husband and I that Stephen would



Stephen 4 years old

“never connect with his peers, he would never live alone and may never get married.” Of course, he had no right to make those predictions and deny any family the hope that is needed to support a child with autism.

Joyce: Was there something that triggered it, a vaccine, food, or something else?

Kathleen: We will never be sure what, if anything, triggered Stephen's autism. We know there were many red flags along the way but none that specifically can be blamed for being the sole cause. In fact, I have come to believe that there is no one cause of autism and that individuals, like Stephen, are sensitive to a number of dietary

and environmental triggers that others can tolerate without any significant health risks. I also believe that medical treatments I received during my pregnancy played a role in Stephen's health and overall sensitivity. This is also true for my induced labor and the medications that I receive during labor.

For example, mothers who are low in oxytocin (like me) are often given the synthetic form, Pitocin, to help progress labor. One study, published in JAMA Pediatrics, notes that pregnant women who have their labor started or sped up artificially are slightly more likely to have autistic children. Studies also point to pregnancy as a critical period in the brain changes that lead to autism and I was prescribed Tylenol with codeine for severe muscle spasms during pregnancy. I recall asking my OB/GYN about the safety of this medication and was reassured that it was proven safe. Of course, knowing what I know today, I would never use it or even consider it.

So, I think there were many factors that stacked up against Stephen's ability to tolerate the current schedule of vaccines, chemicals in our environment, and genetic alterations in some of our foods.

JAMA Study referenced above: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23938610>

Joyce: Did you take him to a Western health care provider?

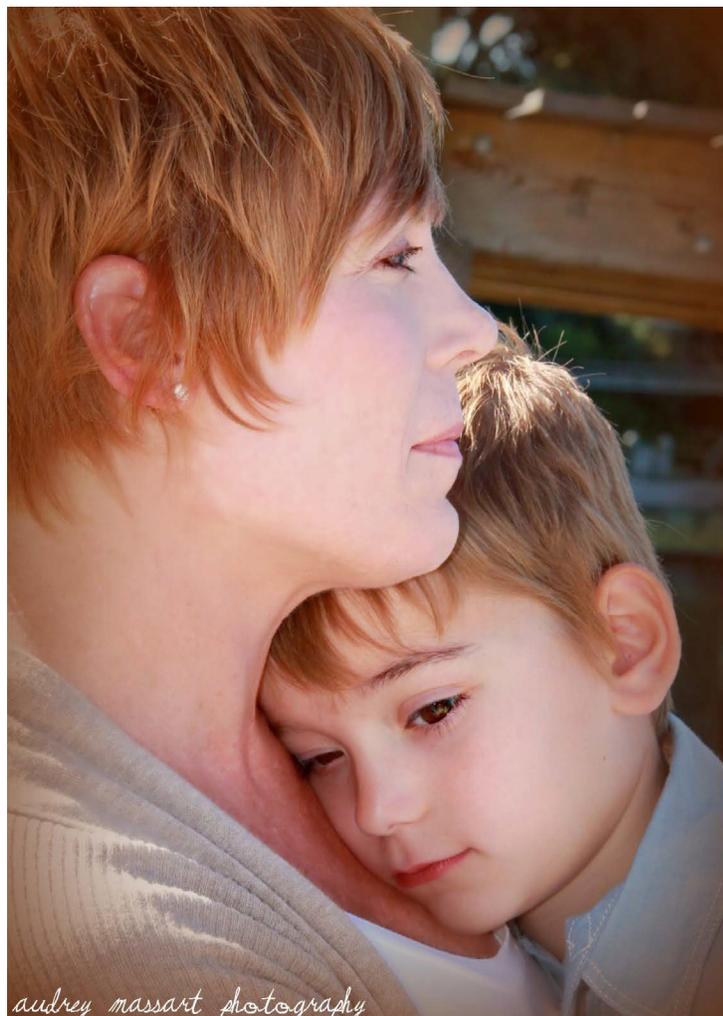
Kathleen: In those early months, I repeatedly questioned some of Stephen's symptoms and behaviors with his pediatrician and was quickly dismissed. Intuitively, I knew that he should not have so much gas, and that he should be showing interest in toys and even starting to attempt crawling. Over and over, they said, some kids do these things late, just wait. Since motherhood was a new role for me, I second guessed my own intuition and trusted that the pediatrician knew better than me. Of course, the truth is – Mother knows best.

Joyce: What did they say the first time they examined him?

Kathleen: Some of the early concerns were about Stephen's low weight. I was told to supplement my breast milk with formula because Stephen was not gaining weight as quickly as his pediatrician wanted.

This was certainly related to Stephen's poor ability to latch properly. Fortunately, I was determined to make breastfeeding work and I stayed committed to breastfeeding without supplementing with formula. Years later we learned from his speech pathologist that this early decision may have been one of the biggest contributing factors to his ability to improve speech because of the way the tongue is used for nursing and Stephen had apraxia of the mouth (which means he could not lift his tongue for proper speech).

At Stephen's 18-month checkup, I raised my concerns again around his lack of language. His pediatrician said, "It's still too early to worry, if he is still not talking by age 2, come back." Interestingly a colleague of mine mentioned early intervention for her son who was developmentally delayed and from that one conversation I immediately sought services for Stephen and notified his pediatrician of my decision. This was the beginning of my role as Stephen's advocate.



Joyce: What was the protocol suggested for healing?

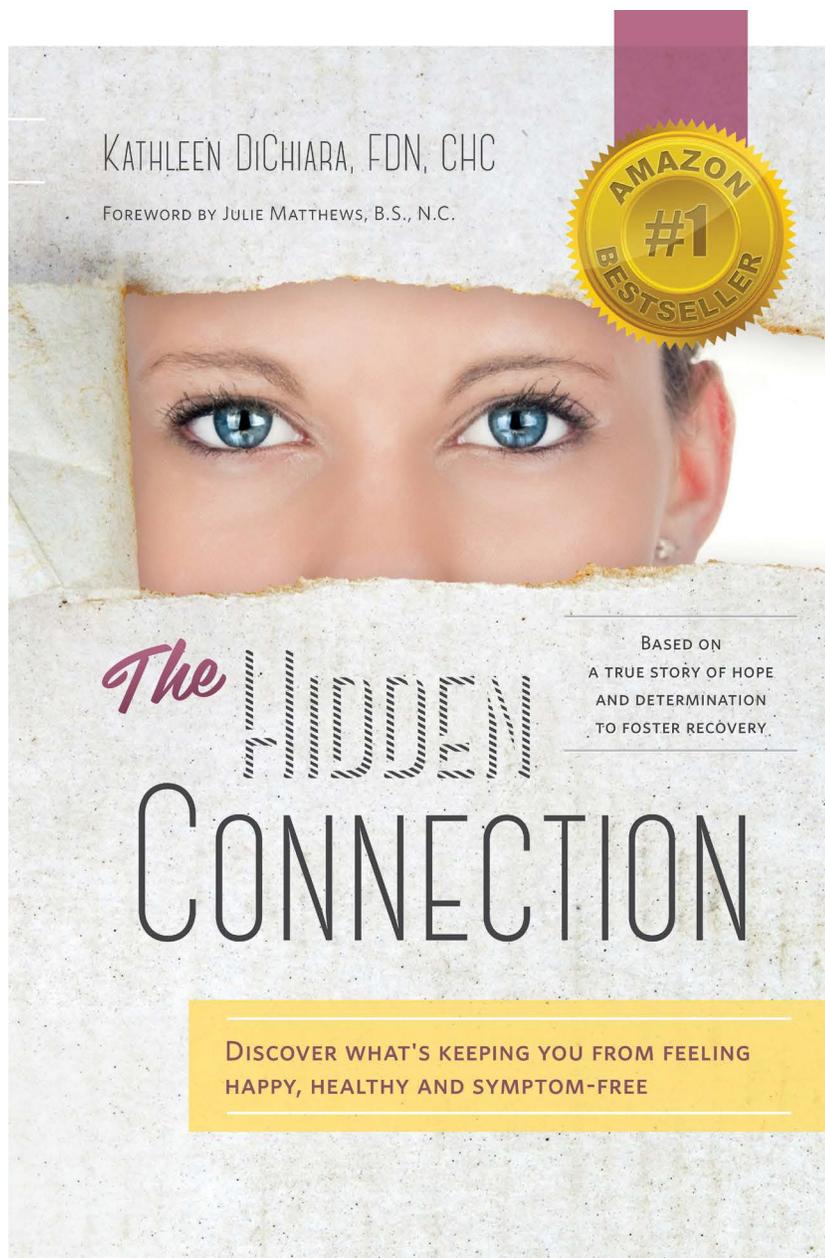
Kathleen: All of the options available to us involved therapy – speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and sensory therapy, which we believe are critical to the whole body approach necessary to support a child with autism. However, these therapies rarely address the underlying root issues.

We started therapy at age 2 and progress was slow and inconsistent, but by 2011 (Stephen was 8), I started to experiment with nutrition. Stephen continued to make progress so we stayed the course. The more I learned about nutrition, the more specific we addressed his dietary needs and realized that this was the missing piece of the puzzle for him. In fact, it was a total game-changer for him.

We initially started with the removal of food dyes, preservatives and artificial sweeteners that we knew were not promoting health and had the potential to be agitating to his brain. Then we moved on to a gluten-free/casein-free diet, which is currently the most popular dietary intervention for children on the spectrum. We saw notable improvements with this

change (but you have to remove 100% of the gluten and dairy.) In fact, I always recommend that the entire family make the same dietary changes to support a child. I don't think children should have to exercise self-discipline with food at any age. I call this approach, creating a "safe haven" at home where the child can eat whatever is in the house.

We also did specific supplementation. Some of the key nutrients we used to address Stephen's deficiencies were Essential fatty Acids, B-vitamins (especially B6 and B12), magnesium, zinc, and vitamins A, C, D, E and K. It's interesting to note that each of these nutrients can play a key role in resolving many symptoms of autism. For example, zinc is involved in numerous aspects of cellular metabolism. It plays a key role in immune function, protein synthesis, and wound healing (including the mucosa of the gut). It is also required for the proper sense of taste and smell and it's not uncommon for kids on the spectrum to have an aversion to certain foods, which I think I related to zinc deficiency.



One of the most important aspects of Stephen's recovery was removing genetically-modified organisms (GMO's) from his diet. When I first learned about GMO's, I felt they were bad for us. However, it wasn't until my youngest son battled chronic eczema and body odor despite the fact that we were already gluten-free and casein-free that I started to research more. I learned about endocrine disruption caused by genetically modified soy and about glyphosate, the pesticide sprayed on GMO crops. Glyphosate is a chelator, which means it can "bind to" and remove nutrients from our body. When you combine this with the fact that glyphosate is also registered as a broad spectrum antibiotic that can destroy the healthy bacteria in our gut - making us vulnerable to infections, pathogens and food allergens - I was convinced it was contributing to Stephen's inability to feel his best.

After we removed all foods with genetically-modified ingredients and switched to organic, we saw Stephen emerge in all areas – academically and socially.

Joyce: How long was your son under the care of a traditional Western health care provider?

Kathleen: We visit our traditional health care provider for routine check-ups on an annual basis but that is the extent of the care they provide. Common health complaints, like colds or viruses, are managed very effectively at home using natural remedies.

Our focus is on maintaining health on daily basis rather than relying on Western medicine to "repair" dysfunction. We are grateful for modern medicine for acute injury and other specialized medical needs but the days of visiting the doctor as if it's a repair shop have long passed and we are stronger and healthier than ever before.

Joyce: At what point did you take your son's health into your own hands?

Kathleen: I think once I was equipped with the information I needed to feel confident, I was ready to do more on my own. But, to be honest, it was my own health crisis that forced me to learn about nutrition and its role in chronic disease and that was the catalyst for change.

Joyce: Did you seek out a non-traditional Western health care professional?

Kathleen: I did consult with a local naturopathic doctor who was trained as a DAN (Defeat Autism Now) doctor when Stephen was about 5 or 6 years old. She had a lot to offer and was the first one to suggest a gluten free/casein free diet. Looking back, it is obvious to me that I was not ready to learn what needed to be done. I implemented this dietary recommendation for about one or two weeks and quickly discounted its effectiveness. I was still looking for the "magic bullet." I was also stuck in the mindset that alternative practitioners were too expensive because they didn't accept insurance. Wow, how my perspective has changed. I think once you realize that many of the so-called alternative treatments are actually aimed at resolving the dysfunction in the body and often lead to long-term results, it makes you realize that this model is far more effective and well worth the investment.

Joyce: What protocol did you or the non-traditional health care professional follow?

Kathleen: I was the one that implemented Stephen's protocol. I have

devoted a total of 1700 hours to studying nutrition and its relationship to chronic conditions, including the micro biome and our immune system. Additionally, I have also read over 200 books on nutrition, and listened to over 600 hours of expert interviews on a wide range of subjects from internal inflammation to mitochondria dysfunction.

In fact, once I understood that symptoms in the brain related to learning, mood and focus, were being triggered in the gut (our second brain) I felt empowered to use food as medicine. Until recently, the central nervous system (CNS) and peripheral immune system were thought to operate independently. However, new research confirms that immune-related issues (including “leaky gut”) can influence CNS processes, like cognition, mood, behavior and more. If you want a healthy brain, you must have a healthy gut.

We really did our healing in the kitchen. Two of the most beneficial foods we used were bone broth and fermented vegetables (sauerkraut) because of the ability to heal the gut. It is critical to restore the integrity of the mucosal lining of the small intestine and improve digestion. Then, re-inoculating the micro biome (our gut) with bacteria.



Stephen today

Joyce: How soon did you see changes in your son after the change?

Kathleen: Stephen’s progress was slow and steady. We rarely included anything aggressive. In fact the only treatment we tried that presented adverse effects was homeopathy. We worked with a local MD that was trained in homeopathy and unfortunately this made Stephen’s symptoms much worse. Personally, I do believe this approach is both effective and safe. In Stephen case, it was not ideal and that’s what people need to remember. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach even with natural solutions. You have to experiment and find techniques and approaches that are right for your child and their constitution.

Once we implemented dietary and nutritional changes, Stephen’s progress was faster and more noticeable. I believe that if we had incorporated the nutritional changes earlier, Stephen would have responded faster than he did.

Joyce: How long did it take for your son to be completely healed?

Kathleen: Stephen just completed very comprehensive testing for his neuro-psychological evaluation which he did over three years prior in order to determine his eligibility for services in public school. We are proud to say that Stephen’s doctor delivered the news that Stephen no longer meets the criteria for an autism spectrum disorder. It would be an understatement to say that we are overjoyed. We have worked hard. He has worked hard. We have so much to be proud of and grateful for. The opportunity to share our story with others is our greatest gift of all.

Joyce: Did all the symptoms of autism disperse?

Kathleen: Yes. Stephen no longer has any symptoms of autism.

Joyce: What would you tell a family who has a child diagnosed with autism?

Kathleen: The best piece of advice I could give a family who has a child diagnosed with autism is to find a way to “lift the burden” off the body. When a child has autism, there are always a number of factors at play like poor detoxification, nutrient deficiencies, inflammation, poor digestion and absorption, toxicity, gut dysbiosis and more.

Seek support from practitioners and families that have been successful in improving the health of children on the spectrum. This is getting easier to do now with the Internet. When I was going through this with Stephen, even just nine years ago, I felt very isolated.

Joyce: Is there anything else you want to add?

Kathleen: I will be speaking at Autism One in Chicago on May 20-25, 2015. <http://www.autismone.org/> I will also be supporting families in the lounge with another group of amazing mothers who have also recovered their children from autism, ADHD, sensory integration, and other spectrum disorders. With over 150 speakers and international scientists, it’s an event that will be an amazing resource for families and practitioners. <http://www.autismone.org/>

Links for dealing with autism naturally.

Talking about Curing Autism <http://www.talkaboutcuringautism.org/tag/medical/?gclid=Cj0KEQjw>

The Thinking Mom’s Revolution <http://thinkingmomsrevolution.com/>

Link for the book http://www.amazon.com/Hidden-Connection-Discover-Keeping-Symptom-Free/dp/0990822303/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1426525682&sr=8-1&keywords=the+hidden+connection

Kathleen DiChiara, FDN, INHC Kathleen is a Functional Diagnostic Nutrition practitioner, Integrative Nutrition Health Coach and Author of the best-selling book – The Hidden Connection. She prides herself on a wide-range of nutritional wisdom, food savvy and self-care techniques. Kathleen received specialized training in the biomedical approaches and supplemental interventions to autism after her son was diagnosed with PDD-NOS. Kathleen is also professionally trained as a raw food chef and is board certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. In her own community she serves as the President and Chair of the Board for a 501(c)3 non-profit that services over 40,000 people with special healthcare needs. After years of struggling with every disease listed by the CDC, Kathleen made it her personal mission to spread the word about the healing power of real food. <http://www.kathleendichiara.com/>

