Asthma and Autism, a Double Challenge
When Andrew was 7 months old, he had his first asthma attack.

He had to be admitted to the hospital and was there for a few days while they tried to figure out what caused it. He was always a big hungry kid, and I started feeding him big boy food at the age of 3 months. By 7 months, it was pretty much "anything goes." He was very oral and wanted to suck on everything; he didn't talk much, just kind of alternately sat around or got into trouble.

People asked us if he had autism, but we didn't really want to deal with that question. By the time he was two, he had been in the hospital for asthma at least 10 times, and the doctor prescribed steroids and Albuterol twice daily through a nebulizer. Reluctantly, we started them and saw a huge behavioral change immediately. He became extremely aggressive and angry, and it was obvious that the medications were having terrible side effects, but we didn't know how to fix the asthma, so he stayed on them. He still had asthma attacks, in fact, more frequently than before, but they were not bad enough to hospitalize him.

He just kind of sat around or got into trouble!

I researched everything I could find, and we learned that we could control the attacks with Albuterol, allergy medication and many natural herbal remedies, which you see in the picture, but his behavior was more terrible than ever. We were just not functioning.

Fast forward through more research, and we found the Feingold Program. We didn't sign on for the membership, but I started taking artificial colors and flavorings away, and Andrew's behavior got much better. I was impressed, and as I did still more research, I learned that yellow dye is known to cause asthmatic attacks, so I decided to take him off of the Albuterol and steroids and see if he could do okay without them. Amazingly, he did. He still had attacks, but not the type of severe ones that had put him in the hospital.

We were successful with this for a year and then just got lazy, and we repeated the whole cycle of behavior and asthma attacks. That's when we decided to go "full fledged Feingold." What a huge difference when we could really follow the program! I was able to take away ALL of his asthma medication and all of the herbal remedies. The only attacks he's had since then were three times when we were on vacations or at family parties eating junk food AND with smoke nearby. The change in his behavior has been absolutely amazing!

Andrew has autism, as we finally dared to diagnose a few years ago. When he was eating petrochemicals, people asked about it frequently. When he is following the diet, he's still different, he's still autistic, but people don't ask about it. His functioning is completely different on the diet than off. He still has autistic behaviors, but when he eats the additives he has complete and utter meltdowns.

Like many autistic children, he is very prone to eating whatever he gets his hands on, and this is a huge challenge, but I want parents to be aware of this possibility. I tell them not to judge the program based on what you are feeding your children unless you know for sure that they have not eaten other things. Andrew has been known to spot a piece of colored candy on the ground and gobble it up before we can stop him, and I'm sure there are days when he does this without our knowledge. So while it's obvious that raising an autistic child is challenging, it's so much easier and more rewarding when you aren't feeding him petroleum-based additives in his food and medicine.

Danika Amott
Momma Dana's blog
Dana now helps other moms via her Gotpetroleum.blogspot.com

One mom, "Hopefilled," asked her, "What was the hardest part about starting, and how soon did you see results?"

Dana responded, "I think I just didn't realize how much of a difference I'd see. In my mind, I thought I just wouldn't have the time, I didn't want to cook from scratch, and honestly, the biggest thing was probably that I didn't have a lot of hope that it would work. Every bit of the challenge was worth it once I saw the results. Once I got my Feingold Foodlist book it was much easier because we could pick up packaged food and know that it was safe, and we could also go out to eat.

"The changes were almost instantaneous for us. When we started, we really started. No infractions with food, no 'just a little' here and there. The day after Andrew was petroleum-free I remember looking at Russ and saying,
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'What happened? Look, he's just sitting!'

"About three days later, I said to Andrew, 'Look at me so I can give you instructions,' and he actually looked in my eyes. He hadn't looked into my eyes since he was a baby. He also remembered the 3- or 4-step instructions I gave him. Remarkable!

"It just got better and better. That's when I started noticing the differences with my other kids and myself, too. The time I spent on cooking was free time because I regained my sanity.

"One of the great things is that picky kids stop being so picky. I've noticed it time and again with so many -- kids who wouldn't try anything suddenly stop having food aversions. Andrew would actually throw up before when he had certain textures like squash or cooked onions. Now he'll try just about anything. This photo is his first poori and garbanzos in an Eastern style. It was so easy to make and very different tasting. He scarfed it right down, cooked onions and all!"

She responded to the mom of a 5-year-old who said his mind is going crazy. Dana wrote, "It really hit me because that was one of our deciding factors to try petroleum-free eating. I remember it so well. Andrew said, 'Mom, it just feels like my mind is going crazy, and I just can't stop.'

"That was a scary statement, but now that I've been petroleum-free, when I sneak something, that's exactly how I feel, especially with red dye. I feel like my mind just won't settle down; it runs and runs and won't quit. I'm fearful and angry if I eat colors. I want to lie on my couch and read, and when someone comes near, I want to yell. Then, I go to bed and have restless leg syndrome and panic attacks and can't get to sleep for hours.

"I want to cry when I read that a 5-year-old feels the same way because I know that most of the world doesn't understand, and they keep pumping the chemicals in. After all, the FDA does say it's safe....right?"

Editor's note: When there's a chemically-sensitive child, there's always a chemically-sensitive parent.