Developing Concerns: Autism Recurrence Risk

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is currently estimated by the CDC to affect 2.8 % of children in the US. This population prevalence has been steadily increasing since the CDC has been conducting population based studies. Families with a child with ASD will ask their pediatrician about the ASD recurrence risk for future children. What do we know about this?



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A recent study by Ozonoff et all (Pediatrics 2024, 154 (2): e2023065297) updated our knowledge about this issue by following 1605 infants across 18 sites with an older sibling with ASD until the child was 3 years old. At 3 years, children with classified as ASD or non-ASD by detailed evaluation. What did they find?

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The overall familial recurrence risk was 20.2%, which is almost 10 times the risk in the general population. The two most prominent predictors of recurrence in families were having more than one previous child with ASD and infant male sex. While in the past males were 4-5 times more often to have ASD, in this cohort the recurrence risk was 25.3% for males and 13.1% for females.

Why is this important?

We should be able to answer parent's questions about recurrence risk with current data from a well regarded study. While we can only identify the genetic cause of ASD in about 25% of cases, this study reinforces the importance of close developmental surveillance and regular developmental screening for younger siblings of children with ASD, and for referral for appropriate early intervention services when concerns arise.



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