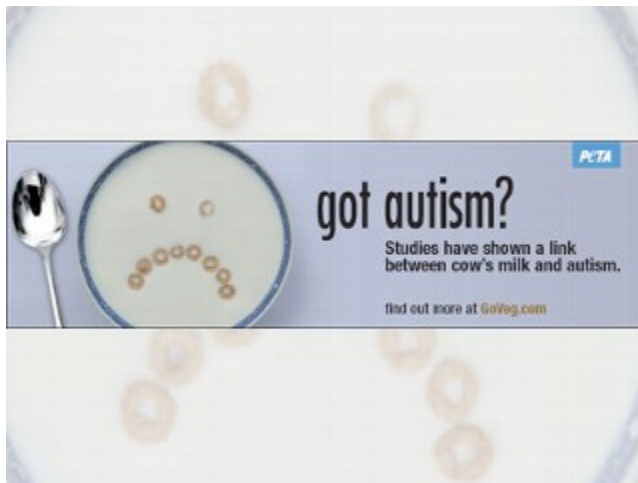


## PETA Campaign Angers Autism Groups

N.J. Billboard Ad Purports Link Between Milk and Autism Risk



### Monitoring Gluten-Free, Casein-Free Diet

This billboard is not the first attack on milk by the animal rights group. In previous statements, PETA has linked milk to other diseases, including cancer and diabetes.

However, according to Rubin, there are no studies proving any link between milk and the onset of disease.

PETA chose Newark for the first billboard of its kind because, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, the city had one of the largest populations of individuals on the autism spectrum, the blog mentioned. PETA said it planned to place the ad in cities where the prevalence of autism is highest.

"Many people that I see on the diet may relieve some gastrointestinal issues, but I won't see anything different in their autism symptoms," said McGrew. "I have never seen anyone cured by the diet."

Many autism organizations agree with McGrew.

"We think the PETA ad campaign is inappropriate because it gives a misleading impression toward a cause or a treatment for autism," said Marguerite Kirst Colston, spokeswoman for the Autism Society of America.

"This advertisement gives the impression that drinking milk causes autism, and that is not the case," said Doreen Granpeesheh, executive director of Center for Autism and Related Disorders.

Granpeesheh said she understands PETA's intentions of the possible benefits of the casein-free diet and pointing to milk, but she said the presentation is walking the line with how the information is perceived. "I think it's really brave of PETA, but I don't think you could say that there has been a link between cow's milk and autism."

But some parents, including Shelley Reynolds, president of Unlocking Autism, swear by the gluten-free, casein-free diet. Reynolds said she has seen a significant improvement in her child's language and motor skills after removing dairy products from her child's diet.

### **Public Education Versus Activism**

"Our point with the billboard is to let the parents of autistic children know that they very well may see an improvement in their child's symptoms if they remove dairy," responded Bruce Friedrich, vice president for PETA.

Friedrich claimed the benefits of limiting the consumption of milk for people with autism significantly improves their quality of life.

"It's kind of funny to imagine how anybody in the autistic support community could take issue with a campaign that educates people to help autism," Friedrich said.

Reynolds agreed, saying PETA's billboard is purely an awareness campaign of the stomach pain, diarrhea and behavioral reactions when some children with autism drink milk.

"There are not a lot of things you cannot control in autism, but you can control your child's diet," Reynolds said. "We don't hold parallel views with PETA, but I think that anything that sheds light on the autism crisis is awesome."

Michelle Guppy, who leads Texas Autism Advocacy in Houston, also agreed.

"If [the billboard] alerts parents to potential issues that are valid, then I don't much care who is putting the ad on," Guppy said.

The messenger does matter, Rubin said. He warned against trusting an animal rights group to make a collective recommendation for all individuals, including those without sensitivities to milk.

"I think this has more to do with 'milk is wrong' than getting it right with autism," Rubin said.

"This latest billboard is the latest tangential attack, and I'm suspicious about what their ulterior motive is."