There is no biological treatment for autism which is more strongly supported in the scientific literature than the use of high dosage vitamin B6 (preferably given along with normal supplements of magnesium). Eighteen studies have been published since 1965, showing conclusively that high dose vitamin B6 confers many benefits to about half of all the autistic children and adults on whom it has been tried. While B6 is not a cure, it has often made a big, worthwhile difference.

Included among the 18 studies are 11 double-blind, placebo-crossover experiments, 8 experiments in which abnormal substances appearing in the urine of autistic children have been normalized by the B6, other studies in which brain waves have been normalized, and a wide range of other improvements: 18 consecutive studies showing megadosage B6 to be effective and no studies failing to show that megadosage B6 is effective. No study has reported any significant adverse effects, nor are they expected by any involved.

None of the studies of B6 in autism have reported any significant adverse effects, nor would any significant adverse effects be expected. I conducted an intensive analysis of the literature on B6 safety before embarking on my first study of B6 in the late 1960s. A review published in 1966 by the American Academy of Pediatrics confirmed my own conclusion: "To date there has been no report of deleterious effects associated with daily oral ingestion of large doses of vitamin B6 (0.2 to 1.0 gram per day).

Tens of thousand of people, including thousands of autistic children and adults, took large doses throughout the '60s, '70s, and beginning '80s with no reported signs of any adverse effects. However, in 1983, a paper by Schaumburg et al. reported significant, though not permanent nor life-threatening side effects in 7 patients who had been taking 2,000 mg to 6,000 mg per day of B6. The side effects, peripheral neuropathy, were numbness and tingling in the hands and feet—the sensation one gets when one's hand is doused in hot water—so that over a 6-week period people who were scheduled for surgery no longer needed surgery. Further, they had not included even a single subject who actually had carpal tunnel syndrome. They did blood and nerve conduction studies on people who were "potentially" at risk for carpal tunnel syndrome, but did not in fact have carpal tunnel syndrome. The anti-vitamin B6 bias in the report is very evident when you read, in their review of research, that "several" studies have reported B6 to be effective in treating carpal tunnel syndrome, while "numerous" reports have failed to confirm the finding. If you look at the actual references in their study, you will see that there are 12 favorable reports, and only 7 negative reports. So, to them, "equal" does not mean "equal." The University of Michigan study, with its highly publicized and totally irrelevant conclusions, is certainly one of the worst and most appalling studies I have ever read. Alan Gaby, M.D., author of The Doctor's Guide to Vitamin B6, referred to it as a "disgusting" display of bias, and I certainly agree with that assessment.

Nothing is perfectly safe, but B6 is exceptionally safe, particularly when compared to the alternative, drugs, which are infinitely more likely to cause severe illness, injury, and even death. An autistic person will improve on high dosage B6 only if that person's body requires extra B6. The benefits of B6 often start within a few days. If no benefits are seen in three to four weeks (in about 50 percent of cases), or if any signs of peripheral neuropathy appear (very rare), stop giving the B6.

A 1995 paper by Ellis and McCully reported that elderly patients who had been taking 100-300 mg per day of B6 for some years experienced only 27% the risk of heart disease, and among those who died of a heart attack, the average age at death was 84.5—eight years longer life than control group patients from the local area. In a 1993 study of epileptic newborns, Pietz found 300 mg of B6/kg/day—18 times the dosage used in autism—to be superior to seizure drugs. And B6, in amounts as high as 50 grams per day, is used as an antidote for victims of certain poisons. Is vitamin B6 toxic? Hardly!

For a list of references and information on the use of vitamin B6 in autism, send a large self-addressed, stamped envelope marked "B6."