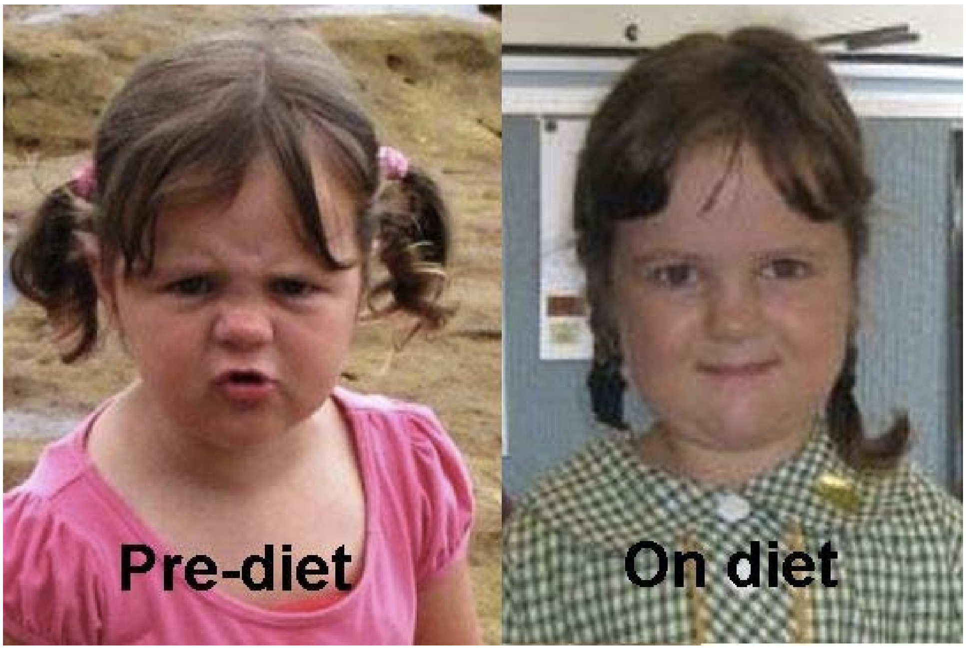
Reader reports from the Food Intolerance Network

www.fedup.com.au

("ODD","oppositional defiance" keywords only)

[1327] Salicylates and the changing face (March 2015)



I could not resist sharing these photos of my little girl about 2.5yo pre-diet. On the left is the face we saw most days, all day. On the right is her now, the new girl. She has just started school and her teachers have said how great her behaviour is in class. So, for those just starting this journey of discovery, keep up the good work, be patient and good results will come.

The Pre-diet girl showed signs and symptoms very similar to severe ODD, ADHD, with anger, over emotional, anxiety, inability to concentrate on a task, several tantrums a day with each lasting anywhere up to 45 mins, self harm , irritability, aggression, frustration, laughing when inappropriate, waking screaming and going to bed screaming, very frequent wees (incontinence), aching limbs at night, blocked nose/sinus, itchy skin (no rash) sleep disturbance, lacking energy, sensitivity to touch, sounds, smells (Sensory Processing Disorder). We changed her diet just prior to her 3rd birthday and within two weeks we saw a completely different child. Even her little face changed. She became a calm, normal, loving, happy, intelligent, creative child. Her behaviour changed to what we would call normal 3 yr old. The odd tantrum, but not lasting long. The other issues she was also dealing with, just about disappeared or were greatly reduced ie sensitivity to sound/touch, aching limbs at night, incontinence, making toilet training possible. If they returned, we knew that we had gone over the salicylates threshold. We stick to a diet with her of low/mod sals. Knowing her diet, we can sneak in the odd strawberry or other higher sals foods here and there. No preservatives, additives, msg, artificial colours for her where at all possible. She is my third child, first child from second marriage.

My other two children have no issues like this. Oldest has lactose intolerance. Youngest from second marriage has lactose intolerance too. Having ulcerative colitis now at 44, I realise that I had my own food sensitivities as a child and continue as an adult. I admit though, that we have not done strict challenges - Jan on facebook

[1302] Range of withdrawal symptoms - facebook thread (February 2015)

Our entire family went on an elimination diet seven years ago because of behaviour issues with our second son (who has oppositional defiance disorder) and to our surprise, our eldest son's behaviour got really, really bad - it turns out he was having withdrawals from the artificial ingredients. By the end of the three weeks I had four calm children and when introducing foods I noticed that the eldest is affected by artificial colours (102 especially - it's evil!), as well as the bread preservative 282, and the second son reacts to amines (gets the ODD symptoms!) and salicylates (vocal tics). Hang in there! – Michelle

[1295] Amines: ”I'd love Failsafe to become common practice in my country (December 2014)

My 7 yo son has gone from a "Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" personality, which included plain meanness, virulent on-and-off, ODD, and actual violence, followed by heartrending bouts of crying and heavy "drugged" sleep, to showing the world and his school the all-around nice, bright kid I knew he was, and his honors roll presence is exactly correlated with his "sticking by the Failsafe rules" periods. Our asthma inhalator sits unused for weeks already. Son's jaw- grinding, bedwetting, sleeves munching, and shouting all kinds of weird "war cries" at the most unbecoming moments, his bouts of self-hitting, his nightmares, are a thing of the past (did I say "thank you" already?). For him too, the amines challenge was... let's say premature - family from France

[1288] 220: Sulphites send my 17 yo into a complete ODD asshole (November 2014)

Sulphites send my 17 yo into a complete ODD asshole, more than typical teenager shit and attitude, he has had it all his life and only cottoned onto food intolerances when he was 15. Since cutting out the crap that sends him loopy, from depression, out of control anger, tears and stuttering and almost like Tourette type syndromes, he has gone from a failing student all his life to one getting A's and B's in most subjects and doing uni pathway for year 12 next year. Honestly we are all in amazement this is happening, its hard work, nothing in the supermarket is hardly ever suitable and he's fussy but so worth it because the whole family pays for it when he goes off track, as you can imagine a 17 yo with his friends eating and drinking anything they want, I have no control when he isn’t home.

I love the facebook group, makes you feel not so isolated and alone with issues like this, people think you’re being fussy or just making it up but if they had to live with consequences it would a different story. I have a six year old daughter who is thankfully benefiting early on from what we have learnt from my teenage son - Bec

[1272] One-liners (August 2014)

My daughter is 8 has been diagnosed with ODD. We have all been failsafe since mid Feb 2014 and I cannot believe the difference this has made to our lives...Trina from facebook group

[1255] Oppositional Defiance Disorder ODD - thread from facebook (February 2014)

My DS7 admitted tonight that he is doesn't listen because he does not like what he may have to do at the time (i.e. defiant after they didn't practice enough flips at gymnastics tonight). Is then just a derivative of ODD or is food intolerance contributing to it? I hate to keep him on the elim diet if he is just naturally defiant...lol, if you know what I mean - Michelle

I think that defiance, tantrums etc are part of my DS4 personality, but I def think that Failsafe helps to control it and lessen it! - Megan

My dd6 said the exact same thing, and he's the child without intolerances! - Teresa

How long has he been on elim diet? It is hard to tell as even the person having the intolerance doesn't know the difference until they have been 'clean' for a while. The feeling of being persecuted and your reaction being appropriate remains even when you come out of it - Kim

How long have you been on the diet and was your son able to communicate this defiance to you before failsafe? My son (ODD and ADHD tendencies) always told me he didn't know why he behaved the way he did or why he did something wrong, but after starting failsafe has at times made up excuses for his behaviour that had I believed him would lead to going off the diet - ODD related I believe, they can be cunning (from personal experience) - Kylie

Good on you for sharing Michelle and trusting us with this. My son has ASD and tells me exactly the same thing. Exactly. All you can do is give FS a go and see if his behavior changes. I remain calm with my voice and don't get sucked into the turn-taking in arguments with our son. I let him have his say (because he loses it if I go the power play and try & shut him down) & then I say, okay it's my turn. I keep my language simple & repetitive. I also suggest talking when there's no eye contact, like in the car. Explain that sometimes mums ask kids to do things and they have to do it. That's the rules. It's tough. But I'm sure you are doing great - Helen

Two thoughts come to mind. Your son says now he has choice - failsafe gave that to my son and before failsafe he had no choice or control over his level of frustration. But frustration is a normal human response too and kids learn and pattern successful behaviours that work for them early. I therefore believe it is possible to learn and unlearn destructive but successful behaviours. We used a combo approach of retraining with failsafe. Have you done challenges yet? Watch for his level of self control when you do them, not just the amount of defiance exhibited. It might answer your question. But consider normal learned behaviours too. They are usually harder to identify as we the parents are part of the cycle of reactions in relationship. Sounds like progress to me if he can identify his own behavioural choices. Pre failsafe for us this was impossible; now he can be defiant but we know the difference between reactive defiance and normal kid defiance.. even when it seems huge...Ries

My middle daughter is an absolute angel when she is not affected, but when I'm challenging a food which doesn't agree with her body, she is a feral little girl with ODD tendencies and extreme fatigue too - Julie

Michelle responds: We have been on the elim diet now since Sept. 13 but were making mistakes and cheating. I think we have now hit a baseline. Thank you everyone for your comments. It is absolutely true...my DS7 didn't have control before over his defiance and it is a blessing that now he can voice his reasons for not wanting to do something. In October we introduced peeled cucumbers and sugar snap peas and he had a headache and lethargic for two days. Ate garlic bread with cheese on New Years's Eve (we are vegetarians, DF, GF) and he wanted to beat up his best friend over something small the next day. However we are going to try challenges again here shortly.

[1212] 3 days into failsafe and 10 yr old with oppositional defiance is an angel! (July 2013)

Husband is gobsmacked! 3 days into failsafe and 10 yr old with oppositional defiance is an angel! Best behaved of all 6 boys!!!!! Too hard to do elimination with 50% custody so have done the maximum changes I can. He's converted to fs bread sambos with nuttelex and golden syrup. All boys are happy with dinners and lunch boxes. We may never know what his intolerances are but even hubby agrees we can live with feeding the boys this way. (We eat later) soo happy WOOHOO!!! Going to start keeping a food and behaviour diary to give to ex wife (most likely to ignore but you never know!!!) – grateful husband, by email

[1211] To do the diet or not, a facebook thread (July 2013)

It's worth a try. My 4 year old was a right little monster, almost ODD. I have taken out colours, preservatives and flavours haven't done the whole fs diet but this has worked wonders. He can concentrate now flow directions his per prep teachers have seen a massive improvement. We can also tell when he had had something that he shouldn't. Give it a go it is worth a try - Tracey

[1184] Diet "instead of living in a war-torn home" (February 2013)

I have found Fed Up to be amazing, a real eye opener. My daughter is 28 months old, and I now know that my daughter has Oppositional defiance. What a relief as I thought I was going to go insane with her. We have made a few changes with avoiding anything with 160b and 282 in bread and the difference already has been amazing. Now I want to undertake the elimination diet under supervision as I also have an 11 month old son who I know will also benefit. The book has really opened my eyes and has inspired my partner and I to push forward to get the best from our kids instead of living in a war-torn home. The work you are all doing is amazing so please keep up the good work. You have given me belief that life will get better and that the kids will have a better quality of life, because from small changes we can already see it happening so I can only imagine once we have completed the elimination diet the benefits we will receive. Thank you sooo much. - Gloria

[1183] Headed for a life of labels (February 2013)

My 4 year old daughter was headed for a life of labels due to her inattention and naughtiness especially at kinder, and I am hoping we have found the answer. She was advanced with everything up until the age of 2 and then has slowed down, especially in the last year, becoming more and more immature, naughty, silly and unable to concentrate, with only selective listening, especially in public and at kinder, but she wasn't like that all the time, so I knew it wasn't the real her.

It's been 5 days on the diet and she has been calmer, more co-operative and more focused, but I think we have made some mistakes each day, due to wrong vegetable oil and my ex-husband's insistence that only a "tiny bit" of curry powder would be fine. It wasn't fine, she went hyper. I also suspect dairy could still be causing problems, her bolts to the loo and sloppy poos have almost stopped with lactose-free milk, but she is still doing it occasionally and can't maintain concentration after a while if she's had products that contain milk.

A month later: We are still progressing well. The school holidays were great, as it was easier with less rush. My daughter has been wonderful. There have been some wow moments: I had to drop something off to a friend who works next door to a McDonald's, and she asked if I wanted to grab a quick coffee there. I explained to my daughter that I would not be buying her anything, but would get her something yummy when we got home - she went and played and didn't once ask for anything to eat or drink. Then, at a birthday party I told her to say good-bye to her friends because we were leaving, and after I had said my goodbyes, expecting to have to hunt for her and then have the typical battle to leave I'd always faced, I was shocked to find her inside, waiting for me at the front door.

Milk still seems to be a problem for her, even A2 milk, on the days she has more, I hear a lot of throat clearing and the more old behaviours I see for the next day or so - silliness, lack of concentration, irritable and more oppositional, but still nowhere near the pre-diet days. Her kinder teacher has noticed and commented on the change, and so did her Ready Steady Go Kids instructor (and that was on one of her not so great "after-dairy" days).

As for me I have not been as disciplined at times, especially when we are rushing out somewhere, I have skipped breakfast in favour of a muesli bar on the run, and paid for it later with headaches and irritability. But overall I feel so much better, clearer headed and my sinusitis, hayfever and headaches are, for the most part gone!!! They used to be frequent – Jenny by email.

[1162] 282: And oppositional defiance (from FAILsaf19 June 2000)

I have recently joined the Failsafe Fan Club after watching the Current Affair special. You'll be pleased to know that all of my local bookstores immediately sold out of "Fed Up" and several orders were placed.

I was so frustrated to not be able to get my hands on a copy of the book, the symptoms that the children described were identical to things my daughter has been experiencing for the past year, voices in her head, a motor that never stopped running, hating herself and others, arguing with adults, and a worsening learning delay.

I logged on to your web page, read all the newsletters, made a manual list of all the readily available Failsafe products, printed off the additives to avoid, and immediately eliminated preservatives and colourings from my pantry and my shopping list.

The most obvious reaction has been the elimination of the bread preservative 282. We have had a breadmaker for 12 months now but had recently become lazy and had reverted back to using commercial breads. I could never understand how my daughter could be an angel for one whole day and then spend the next 5 days angry and sullen. The Reader's Stories showed me that preservative 282 could be the culprit. I am now only using Laucke's pre-mix in my breadmaker or commercial bread without 282. My daughter's Oppositional Defiant Disorder has disappeared within a week. My husband and I were so dumbfounded when we issued an instruction last weekend - expecting it to be completely ignored, followed by a stormy argument - to have my daughter jump up, reply "Yes, Mummy, sorry I didn't hear you the first time", carry out the task and then return to her play. We sat and looked at each with stupid grins on our faces for a full five minutes. - reader, by email

[1139] One-liners (September 2012)

"We started failsafe eating several years ago after going to the pharmacist with a script for Ritalin for my son. The pharmacist refused to fill it. He said 'for oppositional defiance, you need to read this book and look at food'. It changed our lives". - from Fedup Roadshow 2012

[1136] I am a cook in an Aged Care facility (September 2012)

I am a cook in an Aged Care facility and I am trying to implement an additive and preservative free diet for the home. After observing the effects of failsafe eating with my stepson who suffers from Oppositional Defiance Disorder I am a convert to the cause. - Chris

[1133] Food additives and dementia in the elderly (September 2012)

My in-laws have recently moved in with us while waiting for a nursing home. We have been failsafe for years and I have noticed a trend, that whenever my mother in law eats artificial colours and flavours in something like a finger bun with pink icing, or the cheap and nasty cream biscuits, she becomes very oppositional ... more so than usual.

My father in law does not and won't accept the role food plays in our life, and he is the one who buys the rubbish. For our own sanity, we will just have to hide it, then throw it out. I can now understand what living with a child with ODD must be like. I am sure she would have loved to hit me the other day!!!!!!

Given that in nursing homes, a lot of the food has artificial colourings, (e.g. jelly and custard etc), I was wondering if any research has been done on the effect of food AFTER dementia has set in. There are plenty of websites that tell you how to AVOID dementia , but it is too late for that.

So far we have noticed greater oppositional defiance after the ingestion of food that has additives e.g. Farmland Cream biscuits - the two occasions she had ONE, there was a reaction later that day.

Yesterday I think there was also a reaction to salicylates (some tomato sauce she was given at lunch time). Her husband makes most decisions for her ... and I was at work. During the afternoon she tried to put her used control pants down the toilet, rather than in the nappy bucket ... but she was aware she had done something wrong ... it was the first time she had done that. I will try and keep a food diary from now on, although I am not in control of what she eats while I am at work.

Ten days later: I kept a food diary and limited the types of food that my mother-in-law had over the previous week. Then at the weekend she had an iced donut (with artificial colours and probably other additives) on the Saturday and Sunday. The upshot is that last week was TERRIBLE ... she was introspective, restless, agitated, didn't do what was asked ... and ultimately she had a fall. She is now very depressed. There is no way we will give her a donut again! Cheryl, by email

[1107] ODD: Our whole house/lives revolve around him (April 2012)

I have an almost 5 year old son who I believe has ODD. I am yet to get this diagnosed (awaiting appointments) but would lay my soul on it that this is the case. He is the youngest of 3 children (all boys - 12, 11 and 4) and has been difficult from the word go. Things are just becoming more obvious and scaling to a higher level the older he gets. At first we were told (12 months ago) that it's a development stage he will grow out of but this just does not seem to be the case.

Our whole house/lives revolve around him. To say he dictates the household dynamics is an understatement. For the last 4 years of his life, my husband and myself have felt it was us who had the problem.

Something we were doing wrong, something we weren't doing enough of. We have read so many self help books to assist us in being better people, more controlled, more patient, more understand towards others and more at peace with our struggles. We have questioned ourselves as people and our abilities as parents everyday of our lives since he was born. Whilst this has not been of waste (improvement of any kind can only be for the better), we are now realizing that it is not us. We are not bad people and not what creates the problems.

After researching what is happening to him and his behaviors, I have stumbled across ODD, which I have never heard of before. He fits this mould to a tea. Not just four of the symptoms, but all of them and not on a weekly basis but on a daily basis, several times a day.

What I would like to investigate is the option of elimination diet to establish whether food plays a part. Definitely there are better days than others which leads me to believe certain foods may be a contributor considering there are variations to his behaviour. I have not documented nor memorized these instances as I had not even considered this could be a contributor.

Could you please help me in my quest to educate our family and assist my son with what could possibly mean a major difference in our lives?

8 weeks later:

The diet has been working really well. We hired the Fedup dvd from our local library and got the whole family to watch it so everyone could understand the effects of foods in health and behaviours and also what we were trying to achieve. We also purchased the Failsafe Cookbook for recipe ideas as well as the many helpful guides around good choice/bad choice products which became very useful when grocery shopping.

We started with small changes that were a daily consumption. Stuff like breads, milk, spreads, cereals, drinks. These items were traded for better choice products. We didn't remove anything without replacing it first with a healthy alternative. It was important for the children to understand that they were not being deprived of anything but instead by being aware of what they were eating and making better choices, they could still enjoy all the food groups including sweets.

The positive results were almost instant. Our problem son was becoming less of a problem right before our eyes. He became more emotionally in control, less aggressive within his outbursts and far more affectionate than ever before. I started getting hugs and kisses and told several times a day how much he loves me (which by the way in his words is twenty fifty hundred - I'm assuming that's somewhere near infinity). Such simple changes with so much benefit. As a family unit, we have all changed for the better. I can't say there isn't a household member who hasn't noticed at least one benefit within themselves or each other.

It brings tears to my eyes to know that something so simply had controlled our lives for far too long and left myself and my husband questioning our abilities as people and parents. I thank the heavens above everyday for stumbling across your website which provided our family with the tools to make the changes we needed for a better, loving life. For the first time in 5 years, we can now finally bond with our son. Instead of being the control of the family, he has joined with the rest of us in becoming part of the family.

I spread the word everytime food is brought up in conversation. Not just for the benefit of children like my son but for the health and benefit of all people. My only hope now is others out there are able to be introduced to this information, somehow, someway.

Thank you for all you offer families and all the best in your quest with educating the world. – Carina by email.

[1090] "Our lives no longer revolve around tantrums" (January 2012)

I have been working on failsafe eating with my four year old daughter who has extreme behavioral issues - tantrums, oppositional, aggression, etc. We completed the elimination phase, and have been doing some trials. Her behavior improved greatly during the elimination phase, however, on each of the trials the old behaviors have returned. She seems to be extremely sensitive. There are very few food left on my list that are okay for her. Her diet consists mainly of rice, rice milk, chicken, white potatoes, green beans, pears ... She goes to preschool and I pack her snacks and meals for her. It is difficult to do it on such a limited diet. Since we are in the US, the products that are on your failsafe list are not available to us. Our sanity is more important than a varied diet for her - but right now I feel frustrated. I have your book, "Fed Up" and that is what helped me get started with the elimination diet but I don't know how to find a dietician that would support the failsafe diet. Many dieticians here in the US don't believe in foods affecting behavior. (We recommended joining the failsafeUSA group)

Update three months later ... My daughter is like a different person on this diet - thank you so much for all you have done to share your information. She is a much happier person, and our lives no longer revolve around tantrums. Not to mention that her skin has improved a great deal and she is no longer constantly itchy. I have also been able to add more safe items to her diet. I am glad that you have been able to spread the word in schools in Australia and wish that the same thing could be done here. – Elise USA, by email

[1088] Severe anxiety from salicylates (January 2012) COURAGE AWARD

My daughter Rose is 7 years old. Since she was about 18 months old, we had problems with her waking every night with nightmares. Although her behaviour was not exceptionally good, it was not an issue at the time. When Rose started 4 year old kinder we started to notice that her eczema was getting quite bad and that it was not responding to any remedies that we tried. We saw doctors who just said that she might grow out of it. When Rose started school, there was a huge turning point. Her behaviour I would say was ADHD behaviour – tantrums, itching all over her body, stomach pains, still having nightmares, oppositional defiance and the list goes on, and the worst of all, severe anxiety with me leaving her. Rose's anxiety was so bad that she had to be physically removed from me when I left her at school, even punching and kicking at the teachers. Rose would not leave me at all, even on weekends.

With trying to counteract the behaviour part, I stopped all additives and preservatives. Rose's behaviour became so much better. We noticed that her sleep, and feelings of anxiety did not improve.

After reading your book, I made an appointment with a dietician and started on the Elimination Diet. Everything started to improve with Rose, in leaps and bounds, except the anxiety. With many trials, I have now established that Rose is very sensitive to SALICYLATES.

I now have a daughter who is very confident, well mannered, has no problems sleeping, no eczema, nor does she have anxiety.

I can only say that without your help, I had no idea where to turn. The professional field let me down big time.

We have been doing this for about 12 months and I am a true advocate of Failsafe. I want to introduce this to our school. When my daughter was in Prep we had a lot to do with the Principal, as Rose spent a lot of time in her office, as they believed she was being naughty. Last year I was determined to prove them wrong by showing them that food did contribute to children's behaviour. I did often say that it was the food Rose was eating, but I know they did not believe me. I can now truly say that Rose's behaviour was as a result of the food, its additives and preservatives, as she is a different student. Well mannered, high achiever, leader material. Thank you. - Sharon, Vic

[1073] Some feedback from the Fedup Roadshow 2011 (September 2011)

Audiences laugh when I tell them ADHD medication makes children better able to focus on being oppositional, but that’s what one family was there for: 'Ritalin makes him focus, he annoys the hell out of other people and doesn't give a s..t', they said, requesting a diet for oppositional defiance.

'We're here about our 9 yo son with oppositional defiance, we've already realised tomato sauce is probably bad, he lives on it. Also wraps, he eats those all the time. We'll be checking the labels when we get home.'

[1062] Elimination process “the best thing we ever did for our daughter” (July 2011)

We've been the through the elimination process quite some years ago now. Best thing we ever did for our daughter (previously a tantrum throwing, oppositional monster) and our family as a whole. We are lucky in that we can get away with a lot. We actively avoid artificial additives but do let our children indulge at other people's birthday parties. We allow all of the natural foods but keep an eye on just how much salicylates are going in so as not to hit the threshold. Many thanks to you and Sue for all the work that you do. Without your books, website and forums - well, it makes me teary just thinking about what life would've been like. I am constantly referring other people to the website and the books, and regularly loan my copies out. I think I've helped a few people in doing so. – Tammy by email

[1042] 320: Night terrors and oppositional defiance from fries with 320 (from submission to FSANZ 2006)

We know that our 5 year old daughter is intolerant of all the nasty additives, colours, preservatives etc. I was very surprised in the 'Food Tables for People Sensitive to Ingredients or Allergens' (http://www.mcdonalds.com.au/PDFs/AllergenList.pdf) at what they are claiming - no additives in their nuggets or fries!! Certainly not what my daughter's additive radar indicates because last time she ate there, we had her up in the night screaming with "night terrors" and three days of ODD attitude. – K...., Vic

(Antioxidants are not regarded as preservatives so are not listed in the Ingredient and Allergen table. In the full ingredients list you can see that the fries are cooked in canola oil blend with BHA 320 http://www.mcdonalds.com.au/PDFs/IngredientListing.pdf)

[1020] Effects of dairy foods (May 2011)

There is no doubt at all in my mind about the great effect that foods have on my children although it has taken me about 3 years to accept it. But I still cannot get my head around why dairy foods cause such a behavioural response with my daughter. When eating dairy foods, she gets dark rings around her eyes, and is not just bad, she is impossible to live with. I just can not understand how a food can affect her in this way. Her oppositional defiance is incredible. It is also as if she is completely deaf. Her voice becomes so loud it makes me cringe and it also becomes a lot higher in pitch. She is not affectionate at all and is very serious as well. It is as if she has complete focus, driven, locked in, intense, not able to snap out of her bad behaviour. It is only now (she is 5 1/2 years of age) that I am starting to bond with my daughter in a calm and loving way, before this it has been a desperate, lost love.

Since she has been dairy-free she listens, talks more quietly and without intensity, she lets me cuddle her, she does not get locked into bad behaviour and we can negotiate together. She has always been strong willed and very smart but now I can enjoy it. I am so happy now. I guess if there was a logical explanation for this huge behavioural response I would stop questioning my judgement so much. Because it is just behavioural, you can tell our peer group think it is our parenting and they also question the failsafe food idea as a bit odd. I guess what I am trying to ask is how can food affect the voice, make you deaf, fearless, and completely oppositional? - reader, Qld

[1009] ADHD: Denied enrolment at 2 schools (March 2011) COURAGE AWARD

I just wanted thank you!!! My 9 year old son has ADHD, ODD, OCD, anxiety and a learning disability. He was denied enrolment at 2 schools because they feared his ADHD would disrupt other children. He was constantly in trouble at school and has been suspended. He was frustrated and upset every morning and every night, at times he couldn't sit at the dinner table without crying from the stress he felt, he found it very difficult to cope from day to day. From when he was a very young age, my husband and I worked very hard at managing his problems and saw numerous specialists. Originally we took him off bread with preservatives when he was 2 years old. It wasn't until we were at our wits' end a year ago, with schools and counsellors telling us to 'medicate him' - that I decided to buy your book.

A year on, our son avoids salicylates and additives and I have to say I have had a recent comment from a friend who hasn't seen him for a year and she said 'we were so impressed with your son's politeness, his impeccable table manners, you two have done so well with him!, even my sister commented on what a lovely boy he is!'

We managed to get him into a new school, one that I believed would work with us to 'manage' his issues better. Then his new school teacher rang me to say 'I have had a beautiful week with your son, he is very respectful, very caring towards the other children, has lovely manners and we haven't had one episode of hyperactivity or disruptive behaviour, he has a lot to offer and is doing very well'

I have near cried with pure relief and excitement that the little boy I got glimpses off occasionally over the last 9 years is now that nice little boy all day EVERY DAY! and other people can see it.

As a parent who had tried everything to avoid medication, I finally feel we have found the answer to successfully managing a child with behavioural issues. I now tell people – Failsafe, Structure, Management, and above all: Understanding. Your book is gold to us. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. – Leonie, NSW

[1004] Challenges: 3 week reaction to amines (March 2011)

My son's reaction to amine foods is always the same: depression, crying for nothing, being angry, seeking conflicts, ODD like behaviour and many attacks of night terrors (like 5 times in a 2-week-period). He had very strong reactions to pork meat and to chocolate, and the effects to those foods lasted for almost 3 weeks even after stopping the challenge. His reaction to salicylates is the usual hyperactive, silly behaviour, talking too much/too loud and having more little accidents.- by email, Europe

[993] Low salicylate versus low fructose diet (March 2011)

My 4 year old son' behaviour has always been challenging, but has been particularly bad in recent weeks. After complaining of bloating, diarrhoea etc a breath test revealed that he was fructose intolerant (Note: about 50% of people have a positive breath test, so it is not very useful - Fructose malabsorption factsheet). So we started on the strict fructose elimination diet. My GP asked me a couple of weeks later how the diet was going. I responded that it was going well and that my son had not complained of bloating, stomach pains, etc since. However the thing I had noticed the most was his improved behaviour. I'm sure my GP thought I was a little odd, and commented that it wasn't something he'd heard of before but perhaps my son's behaviour is better because he doesn't have tummy pains. I wasn't convinced.

After a few weeks, we started a challenge by reintroducing the high fructose foods. He seemed to tolerate them well as long as he doesn't eat too much fruit each day. However, his behaviour has been foul! He seems more angry than ever, and last week I was wondering if he may be ODD. The Magic 123 which worked well for so long, now has no impact as he is just so defiant.

So, I started FAILSAFE eating 6 days ago. We haven't done it perfectly as his diet is very restricted due to food allergies and the fructose intolerance. But I've removed the high salicylate items, particularly tomatoes, strawberries and cantelope; and we're really just having the good ol meat and 3 veg for tea every night. I've cut his fruit intake to 1 serve every 2-3 days.

Day 1 perfect behaviour although it was still like walking on egg shells.

Day 2 bad morning, good afternoon.

Day 3 good behaviour a little less eggshells!

Day 4, 5, 6 great behaviour.

When things are good he is the perfect gentleman, well-mannered a real angel. But when things aren't going his way he still gets grumpy but most of the time he can now control the anger. A week or more ago, he just couldn't.

Update 3 months later after doing the elimination diet with a dietitian: Things went really well for some time. However, my son was desperate for some of the non-failsafe foods, particularly tomato sauce and jam. So I gradually caved in, and allowed him to have some. Initially it was a little bit every few days, then a little each daily. Although I'm still careful with his diet, he mustn't be able to tolerate even these quantities as we've started to notice some of the same old behaviour. The salicylates seem to have a cumulative effect on him. Whilst his behaviour hasn't been as aggressive or defiant, I'm certainly noticing that he is loud and unsettled. He can't concentrate on playing with his toys, but instead races around the house and jumps on the furniture! So this week were back on failsafe - strictly! – Carly, by email.

What the researchers say: (See page 14 of the RPAH Elimination Diet Handbook 2009 available from www.allergy.net.au): ‘Having excessive amounts of fruit especially fruit juice and dried fruit can cause symptoms such as bloating, reflux, abdominal discomfort, wind and diarrhoea. Although incomplete fructose absorption can cause stomach and bowel symptoms, it does not cause other symptoms such as headaches, fatigue or skin rashes … improvement of symptoms after going onto a low fructose diet is most likely to be due to the simultaneous reduction of intake of natural chemicals in fruits and vegetables’.

[992] We cannot believe that all our problems are gone simply by changing food (March 2011)

I am trying to find the words that will express exactly how thankful I am for the work you do and for the information you make available to parents everywhere.

You really have changed our lives and the life of my 4yr old son whom we were afraid was showing signs of being ODD and even Aspergers. He also was exhibiting symptoms that suggested irritable bowel and gluten intolerance. Since making the switch to fresh food made from scratch we cannot believe the complete change in our son. I had hoped to see positive results but had no idea that ALL of our problems with his behavioural and emotional development would be solved simply by eliminating all processed foods. I have cried so many times these past few weeks which to my family and friends would seem normal as I am often reduced to tears over my son s behaviour. However, I now cry true tears of joy... the change in him is that dramatic!

We suspect that 282, BHA 320, 160b and the major artificial food colourings as well as MSG were the main culprits. However, we decided that the risks with these chemicals are too great and that rather than read the labels and get tricked time and again it is far easier to just cook from scratch the old fashioned way. Being in the kitchen all day is a very small price to pay for a happy family environment!

I have attached a couple of images that summarise how things have turned out for us... a picture tells a thousand words!!! – Carley, by email.

This is the old boy ... riddled with frustration, anger and depression
caused by food. Food that I thought was "healthy"...
but it was keeping him at a distance, in a constant state of misery.

^ before,

and after>


This is the real boy! I knew he was still there somewhere! Happy, confident, interested and loving.
Thank goodnes we did this when we did and that he is back to his normal, funny self after 2 yrs of hell.

Update May 2011: Prior to implementing the diet in our home my 4yr old had never picked up a pencil other than to angrily scribble swiftly on a page before abandoning the task. This image was taken at preschool only one week after being on the diet. I cried. I couldn't believe it, not only was he writing and persisting and trying hard to perfect his attempt at the first letter of his name... he was proud. Proud of himself for achieving something. That meant so much to me, having not really seen that look, that emotion in him ever before." - Carley by email

[975] Ulcerated tongue improves on diet (October 2010)

My son (aged 4) is very food intolerant. His symptoms include nose bleeds, ulcerated tongue, grumpyness, headaches, oppositional defiance symptoms and the list goes on. My daughter (aged 7) suffers from stomach aches, headaches and ulcerated tongue - although not as bad. We have followed the elimination diet in the past and have had success. But after being off the diet for 6 months both children's tongues are ulcerated again …

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[908] 160b: irritability, defiance, head and body banging (June 2010)

We adopted our son from Russia two years ago (he is now three). He is sensory seeking and delayed in speech. We have only recently uncovered a link between his food and behavior, particularly with Annatto. It makes him hyper, sleepless, defiant, irritable, and a body banger against furniture (not limited to head banging), starting within 1-2 hours and lasting up to 24 hours.

Our son had been seeing an occupational therapist 2x's per month for sensory seeking behaviors. The OT recommended looking into a link between nutrition and behavior. We met with an allergist first. Her tests proved negative for protein allergies. She suggested that we start saving food labels any time we suspected reactions and compare them for common ingredients. The first food we noticed was Pepperidge Farm Cheddar Goldfish Crackers. Our son was very stimulated and not able to nap. I saw Annatto listed and wondered what it was. I did an internet search and found your website and others. The next time I saw a reaction, Annatto was in the peach yogurt I had fed him. On this particular day at naptime, he sat backwards in his rocking chair and banged it continually into the wall.

We started the Feingold program here in the U.S. and, as you probably know, it does not address Annatto so we eliminated Annatto as well. Our son's issues decreased within the first week. He was less hyper, more compliant, and able to sleep better, except for one noticeable withdrawal episode - his first on-the-floor kicking temper tantrum. My favorite result to cite is when I asked him to put books away. He answered "Okay, Mama" and did it right away. This is the sweet little boy who was there all along. I hate the idea that the foods I thought were good for him were causing him to misbehave and causing me frustration. We are happy to be Annatto-free now.

We are finding it hard to identify products with Annatto since it is not always stated by name or number in the ingredients list. We are learning to stay away from products with "natural flavors & colors" even if Feingold approved. There are many products that we have since cut out of his diet after discovering the Annatto link.

Changing our son's food and skin care products was easier than I ever imagined. He hardly notices, except for the times I have to say no to certain foods that do not have good things in them for him. It does take extra effort but it is well worth it. Still, I look forward to the day when the food-behavior link is widely accepted, forcing companies to eliminate these harmful additives from our supermarket shelves. – by email, USA

[888] 160b: Defiant, teary, mega tantrums after annatto (February 2010)

I have had great results with my daughter now 4 with a generally additive free, low chemical diet with improvements in behaviour, going to sleep etc (used to have many major tantrums, defiance, took 2 hours to go to sleep). 160b is a big culprit. It makes my daughter extremely defiant, teary and she throws mega tantrums. (It’s so hard to educate my mum - as 160b is in so many "healthy foods" yoghurt, icecreams, etc). Our friends’ son is a headbanger when he eats annatto. – Tamsin, Vic

[862] 129: Bedwetting and behaviour problems due to Ibilex (Keflex) with artificial colour Allura Red and flavour (November 2009)

Just writing to tell you about my son's reaction to an antibiotic called Ibilex (keflex) suspension, for a recent chest infection.

On the elimination diet we have discovered a new child. Finally able to sit still in class and concentrate, no shouting out or disruptive behaviour and dry at night!

While he was on the antibiotic, the teacher informed me that our son's behaviour had deteriorated. He was oppositional, loud, unable to sit still and disruptive. At home the bedwetting started again and his behaviour had also deteriorated but I had not made the connection, I put it down to him being unwell.

As I was giving him his dose one morning I was staring at the pink mixture and it finally dawned. I rang the GP immediately and sure enough it contained Allura Red. It took about a week to get him dry again and his behaviour to settle. – Helen, by email (Allura red is artifical colour 129; also contains bubblegum flavour. A compounding pharmacist can provide medication without nasties, see our Medication factsheet - S)

[840] 635: Ribo rash and cold urticaria (August 2009)

A few months ago, my son developed a sudden, allergic rash that came and went with seemingly no pattern. The rash starts as unbearable itching and then quickly develops into raised welts, like mossie bites, over most of his body, or sometimes, only one part of it, such as his hands. When it starts, as you might imagine, he is considerably distressed by it and often the only sure remedy is to put him into a bath of warm water. This takes away the itching within about fifteen minutes.

We thought of all the usual suspects – things that had been applied to his skin, pool water, clothing, plants and more. We talked to our doctor who couldn't explain it either without going through the full allergy testing drama. Then a friend of mine told me how she had been to see Sue Dengate and directed me to the Fed Up website. We read a bit about ribo rash and thought 'Ah-ha!'.

The week prior to the development of the rash was an odd one for us. We normally eat a mostly organic diet, which began out of concern for the environment as well as health. We still ate occasional takeaway and treats like any family. That particular week, the organics were out the window as we helped our friends renovate – it was a busy week and a lot of convenience foods were eaten. We ate, as it turns out, something with ribonucleotides every single day that week. These included Fantastic rice crackers, ready roasted chicken (several meals), hams and other deli meats, sausages, chips (hot and from a packet) and probably more.

Then our son had the rash for three or four weeks, on and off, while we figured it all out (and of course continuing to unknowingly eat some of these foods). We had to keep him away from school, as the itching was unbearable, came on without warning at any time of day and the only solution was a bath.

The rash also appeared on the place on his body where he was cold, e.g. hands and feet at the beach, at a home pool and in a paddle pool filled with rainwater. The weirdest one was the paddling pool - he only got the rash up to his waist - that was the part that had been in the water.

Finally, when we made the connection, we cut out all foods containing 'the dreaded 600s'. It took almost a week and a half for the rash to completely stop appearing. It appeared less and less severely each day.

I thought that it would be good to try cutting all the artificial stuff out for a short time to see if there was any merit in it. Wow. What a discovery! We thought that his hyperactive moods at the end of each day were due to being 'overtired', in fact, they only happen on the days that he has eaten chemical food additives. Many behaviours that we had previously thought to be 'normal' have turned out to be brought on by chemicals in foods:

- Preservatives: tears, moodiness, unable to be happy, as well as hyperactivity and babbling – usually next day reaction.
- Preservative 282 in bread products – hyperactivity and babbling - about 30 minutes later.
- Synthetic Antioxidants: irritability, opposition to small things, unable to be happy, tantrum like behaviour – about 8 hours later.
- Colours: hyperactivity, babbling, bouncing – about four hours later.
- Flavour Enhancers: rash, itching, recurring up to 10 days later.

We would never have found these reactions without cutting all artificial food chemicals from our diet. We would never have connected a white, McDonald's soft serve (2 colours) with bouncing off the walls four hours later. We certainly would never have figured out that terrible tantrum-like moments were due to eating chips (synthetic antioxidants in the oil) the day before. Since cutting all the 600 numbers out, our son has only had one more episode of the rash – following prescribed medication for croup, which turns out to have several nasty additives and which changed his behaviour too. We are very careful now and can even tell if he has been out with his grandparents and had a milkshake!

The numbers that are a total no-go for us are 620-625 as well as 627, 631, 635. These 'ribonucleotides' are added to most barbecue, chicken or other savoury flavoured things like rice crackers, chips and other snacks, to some hams and processed meats, to sausages, to ready cooked chicken, to hot chips (think chicken salt), even to some brands of 'plain' crackers and more.

A more full examination of failsafe eating has led to the discovery that my son is also intolerant to high salicylates, although moderate consumption is ok. A snack of strawberries or a glass of orange juice is enough to lead to behaviour changes - mainly oppositional. We were all fine with amines and natural glutamates. - Susan, Qld (More about cold urticaria -hives associated with cold - at http://allergies.about.com/od/urticariahives/a/coldurticaria.htm)

[718] Oppositional defiance: eliminating oranges from her diet has reduced her symptoms (February 2009)

I can't thank you enough for your website, for bringing this important information to public awareness. I am an Australian currently living overseas, mother of 2, expecting again. My 3-year-old has always been a 'difficult' child, with some days better or worse than other. In recent times her oppositional behaviour escalated so much that I was on the brink of a nervous breakdown. She was screaming non-stop, day and night, always looking to fight me on every little thing. I just didn't know what to do with her anymore. I have always been a firm believer that when something is wrong, look at diet first. But I didn't know what the problem was exactly. I searched high and low for info, until I found your website. What a Godsend! A simple thing like eliminating oranges from her diet has reduced her symptoms significantly. She is almost sleeping through the night. I am new to this, and still have a lot of reading and learning to do, but you give me hope. Thank you! – *by email*

[717] Oppositional defiance: violence settled (February 2009)

Thank you for your wonderful work, time and love you have put into helping families like ours. Truly if I had not found your book, I believe that my husband and I would have split up and gone our separate ways as this stress was just too much for us. We got no help from doctors or specialists at the Royal Children's Hospital. Our 17-year-old who is doing year 12 this year is living with his grandmother as living with us was not possible due to our other son's impossible behavior. My sister who is a Primary School teacher visited us a month ago and said that if I do not medicate this son, he will not be able to go to a school. His behaviour was so bad. My husband and I still have marks on our bodies from his bites.

He was violent, kicked and hit us. We had to put him in the bathroom as it was the safest because any other room was trashed. We needed time out sometimes. After a week on the elimination diet, family and friends asked if I had sedated him. His behavior had settled so much. He still is not there yet, however we are now on track and I can see light at the end of the long tunnel.

Also may I recommend the ladies buy the DVD to show your men as they will rarely read the book. Watching an hour of a DVD is more comprehensible to the male brain. That is how I got my husband to finally understand our son's behavior and to support what I am doing with him. He now has the book in his van and every spare moment he has, he reads it. He has even told his family and his work mates about this. You would think that he was the one to have worked out our son's problems. Never mind, as long as he is with me on this everything else does not matter – Irene, VIC.

[716] Ear infections, stuttering, rash, IBS linked to milk (February 2009)

We initially started my three year old son on the diet because of his hyperactivity, defiance and rough, impulsive play with others. Once we started the diet these symptoms slowed down but he developed new symptoms of increased emotional state and abdominal cramps. What we didn't realise at first was that we had increased his milk intake and so although the diet seemed to work it bought with it new problems. In hindsight I now have a list of symptoms such as stuttering, pale stools, abdominal cramping, poor appetite, face rash, ear infections, hyperactivity, defiance, dribbling, thumb sucking, rough play and itching head, that I can now link to cows milk as these have all gone since we eliminated it and its derivatives from his diet. I had been to doctors about these individually but was never taken seriously so never connected them all together.

At this stage we think that too many amines make him nasty and too many salicylates make him hyper and we haven't tested additives. Since we took him off the cows milk as well and got over the withdrawals my son now no longer needs speech therapy, has a great appetite and is putting on weight, is able to enjoy play dates, is calm, doesn't complain of tummy ache etc and our life is much easier. We are a much happier family. I think we have further to go in our adjustment to the new diet but we are definitely leaps and bounds ahead from where we were pre-failsafe days. We saw your Kids First campaign launch interview on TV, thanks for being a voice for all us parents out there wanting to scream the same message! - Kylie, by email [Although rarely mentioned by doctors, milk is strongly linked to ear infections (otitis media) Juntti H and others, Cow's milk allergy is associated with recurrent otitis media during childhood. Acta Otolaryngol. 1999;119(8):867-73.]

[714] Salicylates: this time we are 100% committed and the results are clear (February 2009)

My 7yo son suffered from asthma, and my 5yo daughter was borderline ODD, complete with sneaky poos, bedwetting - the whole rack of symptoms. We removed preservatives and colours from their diet with fantastic results - mainly from the removal of propionates and sulphites. I noticed, though, that my daughter's behaviour seemed to deteriorate when she had certain foods such as vegemite, soy sauce etc.

We did not do the elimination diet correctly the first time. We made the usual mistakes - not enough commitment, cheating, coming off it too quickly – and were misdirected in our conclusions - thought salicylates were fine and amines were the baddies. We decided to put our daughter back on the elimination diet after she failed to improve when we removed amines.

This time we are 100% committed and the results are clear. Our daughter was fine the first day of the salicylate challenge, a bit iffy the second, and by day 3 she was back to pre-diet days, even resorting to deliberately (in front of me) urinating on the lounge room floor. Add to this a constant headache, tummy pains and a small rash on both legs. I promptly cleaned out the fridge, and removed all salicylates from the house. Two days on and we are gradually improving, but what a shock!

An even bigger shock was my son's reaction. He was always 'the good one' and didn't seem to have any behavioural issues apart from asthma, which has improved greatly since we removed additives from their diet. By the end of the second day, he had stolen a can of coke from the fridge (dad's stock - banned for our kids) and drank it outside when he thought I couldn't see. Screaming, shouting, fighting, defiance - completely unexpected from him. Two days on and he is quite remorseful - and determined to stay away from 'those foods'. He has also woken up today with big black rings under his eyes, and a wet bed. No coincidence, I think.

I never imagined that food chemicals could have such a significant effect on health and behaviour. My daughter starts school next year, and we can now look forward to a future with more enthusiasm and positivity than we did 3 months ago. *– by email, NSW*

[712] Reactions to head lice treatments (December 2008)

- I had to delay the challenge as they got nits a couple weeks back and had to be treated ... well ... didn't those chemicals send my kids haywire! It took 4 days for the meltdowns to stop, extreme ODD for around 72 hours! - *failsafe mother, by email*

[699] Developmental delay and dyspraxia: 'a big change in speech and development' due to diet (November 2008)

My daughter Bronte is 6½ years old and now in her first year at school. Aside from reflux until the age of 12 months, she was an absolutely delightful baby who was happy and content. She slept 12 hours through the night by 10 weeks old, hit all her milestones and was fairly average in our mothers group.

When Bronte was approximately 14 months old this deteriorated and we had a child who was frustrated, defiant, irritable and downright difficult. She was naughty on purpose and was impossible to discipline. She also developed eczema at this time but grew out of it after a couple of years. We felt that we were failing as parents. Our first son was born when Bronte was 17 months and he has been a delight. As our sons have grown up we realised that they were ‘normal’ kids and Bronte wasn’t.

When Bronte was three and her younger brother was speaking so much better than her, we had her hearing tested. She had the worst glue ear the ENT specialist had seen in years. She had grommets put in the next week and we were reassured that her behaviour and speech would return to normal reasonably quickly. We started speech therapy to help her catch up but things didn't improve. She didn't respond to the speech therapy as firstly she didn't have the concentration and secondly she simply seemed unable to attempt what was asked of her.

At three and a half she was assessed and we were told she had a global developmental delay of 19 months. That was almost half her life. At this point toilet training had become a huge issue. She was the first in mothers group to use the toilet but was always dribbling urine in her pants ven after recently going to the toilet. She resisted every trip to the toilet and it became a battle. She used to hide and poo in her undies every day and didn’t seem to care if we were out.

She was also very tactile and was into anything she could get her hands on that she could smear and finger paint in. This included dog poo. Many times she would emerge with her body covered on hers or the dogs poo. I hate to admit to how many times she ate dog poo and survived.

By the time she got to four she was still attending speech therapy and was about to commence early intervention. We were desperate patents and lucky to still be married at times due to the stress. We were ready to try anything. After many hours searching the internet, my next attempt to normalise our daughter was an elimination diet. A very daunting venture. With the support of my mother who stayed with us and a fairly skeptical husband we made it through the first three weeks. My husband then changed his tune quickly as a different child emerged into our lives. She virtually toilet trained overnight. The painting of poo ceased. Her language improved exceptionally. Everyone in her life commented about what a different kid she was. I will never forget bursting into tears at around the three week mark (in the diet) when she said ‘thank you mummy’ one day I was driving her to speech therapy. It was the first time she showed any emotion or acknowledgement of our feelings.

We continued the diet and commenced challenges. Two hours after eating chocolate and banana she went berserk. She stood on the carpet and wet her pants in front of us. She pooed her pants. She was defiant and oppositional again. And biggest of all, we couldn’t understand a word she said. We now know she is intolerant to amines in a huge way.

Bronte has since been diagnosed with dyspraxia, a language and motor disorder. She still requires speech therapy. Her private speech therapist has since done the diet with her child and encourages other parents to look into it also as she saw such a big change in Bronte’s speech and development.

We took Bronte to a paediatrician six weeks into the elimination diet to discuss her developmental delay. He bluntly told us that some kids were unlucky enough to be developmentally delayed and we shouldn’t expect too much from her. He said we would be lucky if she was able to catch a bus when she grew up. She would be able to do that now. When I told him that were currently on an elimination diet and had seen huge results he said he would never expect a parent to go to that much trouble and would therefore never suggest it. His last words were ‘When you are ready to put her on Ritalin come back and see me’. I walked out of there disgusted and feeling very sorry for the parents who are told this when they are searching for help. I have to say that that elimination diet we did with our daughter Bronte, with help from you and our allergist, has absolutely changed my daughter's (and the rest of our family's) life. - *Wendy, NSW*

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[648] ADHD teen suicide attempts (May 2008) Winner of Courage Award May 2008

I started failsafe eating a week ago in absolute desperation with my 14 year-old son who was diagnosed with ADHD and ODD at the age of 6 years old. He progressed well on medication until we had a car accident last year and he suffered minor brain damage. After the accident his behaviour became worse and he has attempted suicide several times. Last Wednesday I took him to hospital for sedation after he broke windows and several holes in the wall with his head. Thursday morning I searched the net for a solution and came across your website. I started the diet that day. Today I have a son who obeys, talks to you face to face, calmer, quieter, he smiles and has got himself a job part time which he loves. If he is offered food at work he says no and takes his own or waits until he gets home.

One week later ... Today is day 15 and he is still going great. We have just had the best school holidays with our two sons playing instead of fighting physically and verbally. At work, his boss doesn't even know he has ADHD and ODD. He did eat a piece of chicken at work and advised me his brain felt funny and would not eat anything that is not on the list. I'm glad he tried something off the list in moderation and noticed the difference. Your Failsafe Cookbook has been a great help and I do not leave the house without the list of basic foods and list of additives. I call this my bible. Not only has his behaviour changed but also his stomach pains and migraines are a thing of the past. The television has gone from a volume of 60 to 15. Thank you for your website that changed our lives and made my teenager happier. The difference has been unbelievable. - Janelle, Qld.

[575] Vocal tics, word and phrase repetition due to salicylates and additives (September 2007)

When Chris was born he was a big, boofy boy. For the first six month of his life he was a placid, calm, happy child. At six months, he changed to being very, very active, fidgety and demanding. Looking back at that time, three things changed – he started long daycare, solids and formula. I also remember very clearly that his face changed as big dark circles and creases formed under his eyes. He was labelled 'naughty, disruptive, hyperactive and violent' by daycare when he was only 10 months old. He was walking at that stage and continued to escape from the childproof room, or to snatch toys from non-mobile babies.

Since that time he has been variously diagnosed by health professionals as having Tourette's Syndrome, the hyperactive type of ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and others. Whatever the term, the symptoms are the same, including unmanageable behaviour, poor impulse control, loud voice, vocal tics, word and phrase repetition and lack of empathy.

Coupled with the behaviour has also been a range of other medical problems including croup, asthma, headaches and stomach aches, unexplained temperatures and eczema. Chris also suffers from glue ear and for the last four years has had grommets inserted every winter to enable him to hear clearly. (As I know now, these are all indicative of food intolerance.)

Last year I took Chris to a paediatrician, looking for a solution to his constant illness rather than his behaviour. The doctor took one look at him – he was making duck noises and running in circles around the waiting room – and diagnosed food intolerances.

We went home with a complex list of foods to avoid. Although his health improved, his behaviour seemed to become worse, as it always has in summer. Just before Christmas, I found the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's elimination diet for food intolerance. This diet was stricter but far more logical than the one we were using. It worked by identifying the chemicals that people react to, then the foods that contain them. Interestingly, the research showed that most people with food intolerance react to the salicylates in fruit. I had been loading Chris up with cherries and nectarines in term 4. No wonder his teacher was ready to send him to Alcatraz late last year.

I switched the family to the RPAH elimination diet during the holidays. Gradually, as we removed foods from the diet and found acceptable replacements, Chris' behaviour improved. Living with him became easier, there were less sibling fights, and when he did misbehave it was easy to use normal parenting techniques to modify behaviour – something that had never worked before.

By the end of the summer holidays, I finally had a calm, reasonable, sensitive child, who was able to play at other children's places without causing mayhem, would look at people when talking, and would allow other people to talk without interrupting. Amazingly, Chris was keen to stick to the diet, having realised how good he felt.

First day back at school and I had lots of positive comments about how calm or grown-up Christopher seemed. A good start to the year. However, as I write this, I am back to having a child who runs around making chicken noises, uses a loud voice, is prone to crying and is violent and aggressive. What happened? He got to school and started to cheat. He ate chocolate cake, m&m's, muesli bars and lollies. For him, even the smallest amount results in a reaction. It is like being on a trip – he can't control his behaviour, and trying to discipline him has no effect.

So what do I need, or more importantly, what does Chris need? He needs the support of the school community to assist him to stay on his diet – he needs recognition for the fact that he does suffer from food intolerances – he desperately wants to feel in control of his life, and he likes feeling calm and relaxed, so please, please, please don't feed my child, or encourage him to cheat. - by email, Sydney

[561] Nurofen mistake (May 2007)

Thank you for helping us to get back the children we were meant to have. We have been failsafeing for about 2 1/2 months mainly for our 4 year old daughter who was defiant, argumentative, oppositional, angry, sometimes violent, sometimes hyperactive, deliberately annoying, and would be awake for 2 - 4 hours after bedtime before falling asleep. The contradiction being that she could also be charming, loving, insightful, enjoyable, happy, playful, caring, enjoy an activity (craft, colouring, building etc) for extended times, clever, calm and inquisitive.

About two years ago we learned about colours and preservatives (from "The Chemical Maze") and pretty much took them out - apart from occasional treats – with good results and we had no idea there was so much more to the food chemical story. I never would have considered fruit etc, I just thought I somehow had to be doing a bad job at disciplining my child and that must be why she is still the way she is. While reading Fed up with ADHD my hopes were ignited for a better life for all of us as I worked up the courage to go failsafe and give this a try. It was a daunting thought with a new baby as well but we really had no choice as far as I could see so we started! Amongst the initial flurry of the first few weeks the results were incredible as we saw emerge this delightful child and hardly any of the pre-diet behaviour. I now feel it is our way of life and I am learning to manage the work load of the constant cooking, baking and planning around food. My once skeptical husband is a beautiful support and really helps out with the kids and the washing so I can keep up with the food etc. We have seen some remarkable changes but there are still some things that concern me though.

After 3 weeks on elimination, our first challenge was salicylates and we had a severe day 3 or 4 reaction, stopped on day 5 and I think we were just starting to come good after about 6 days from stopping when we had a friend's birthday party the next day. We had been so strict, everything to the letter and the girls' attitudes toward the diet was so amazing that we thought we'd have a day off and give them a "treat". The party food wasn't as bad as it could've been. A lot of home cooking. But they did have some lollies, fruit and chocolate. The girls couldn't believe it after about 5 weeks on the diet! Anyway, behaviour started that evening and it was pretty foul for about three weeks. We also made the mistake of giving her Nurofen for a sore throat in the week following the party but apart from that we were back to 100% failsafe the day after the party. So after about 3 weeks of reaction type behaviour she started to become progressively better but still with some D.F.Asleep (down to 1-2 hours) and still to many times of defiance and aggression etc. amongst the good behaviour. We are now 4.5 weeks after the party and 5.5 weeks after the end of our salicylate challenge and I feel like we are not yet back to how it was in the first three weeks. – from a country failsafer [this family is now doing well]. Their problems included daily Sakata rice crackers, accidental exposure to lawn fertiliser, and Nurofen. Although Nurofen doesn't contain salicylates, most salicylate sensitive people have cross sensitivity to it and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as naproxn and diclofenac. You can regard one dose of aspirin or Nurofen as the equivalent of a week's salicylate food challenge, ref: Jenkins C and others, Systematic review of prevalence of aspirin induced asthma and its implications for clinical practice, BMJ. 2004;328(7437):434.For more possible reasons for diet not working, see Checklist of Common Mistakes]

[531] ODD reaction to spring flowers and Floriade (January 2007)

A reply to the question in newsletter #50: my oppositionally defiant amine-sensitive daughter is having a hard time at the moment and I am wondering if it might be due to spring flowers?

The question about ODD and spring flowers in the last newsletter rang a bell with me. My daughter Louse also gets really cranky and her ODD symptoms worsen during the period when all the wattle begins to flower, and then in early spring when the flowers start to bloom in abundance. Unfortunately, this also happens to be the exact time when she has to be most in control of her temper and emotions due to her Irish dancing commitments - the state and national championships.

This year was particularly bad - there seem to be so many more wattle trees around here now, and they started blooming at the start of July. Louise was extremely bad-tempered - her quality of schoolwork declined, her spelling declined (even though she is now a voracious reader) to the point of going backwards, maths dropped back to grade 3 level (age-wise, she is year 8) and there have been many arguments and temper tantrums with all family members. It got to the point where I was beginning to doubt my sanity! and also, whether she was sneaking non-failsafe food from other sources - but I know my friends wouldn't give her anything unsafe, and her friends just don't like her behaviour when she deviates from the diet, so that wasn't a factor.

I was thinking that the culprit might be pollens. It was totally validated when we went to Canberra in the last week of September for the Australian Championships. One word – FLORIADE - Canberra's flower festival. Yee-hah. All that pollen in one convenient location! Louise's dancing was shocking during practices, she argued with her friends over the dancing (SHE wasn't making mistakes, EVERYONE else was), arguing with her teacher (who she loves), crying, picking fights, "I wish I'd die, then everybody would be happy, because nobody wants me around" - I'm sure you can imagine the rest!!!

It's getting better now, I've cracked down on a few infractions, and she is asking her friends not to spray their deodorant near her (and at dancing, spraying deodorant, hair-spray or perfume inside the hall is now banned) and she's taking a claratyne daily to help with the pollens. She's definitely a reactor when it comes to pollens and spring! – reader, Vic

[528] “When we started the diet to help our daughter, we didn't realise it would help our son’s asthma too …” (January 2007)

After years of friends and teachers telling me that my child needed medication (she was a "Jekyll & Hyde" according to one teacher) and doctors who just assumed her problems were hormonal, a girl guide leader noticed my 9-year-old daughter’s behaviour problems (fighting, defiance, stealing etc) after eating certain foods and suggested failsafe eating. Within weeks, apart from a few withdrawals, everyone noticed an improvement and now, nine months later – what a difference! When we decided to do the diet to help our daughter, we didn't realise it would help our 6-year-old son’s asthma too but he hasn’t had an attack or been hospitalised since we started.

Unfortunately my doctor is not very supportive, but I have found a great paediatrician. As she said in the last appointment, the food companies market all of these so called good foods to our children, but she ends up dealing with the backlash e.g. behaviour problems etc.

My son and daughter are now at the stage where they don't ask for "bad” food any more because they know what it does - at a friend’s workplace recently he bought them a huge packet of lollies, to which they politely stated "No thank you". When he persisted as to why a couple of 9 and 6 year-olds didn't want lollies, they said "Because I choose to be healthy" which is what they have learnt to say when teased at school about having to be on this diet.

I know now that what I thought was healthy, e.g bread, devon, tomato sauce etc, wasn't healthy for them. During the challenges, my daughter reacted to amines, colours and preservatives. My son reacted violently to the colours with his asthma mostly but hasn’t had an attack since we started failsafe. My son couldn't care less what the kids at school say anymore. When they open their packet coloured foods, he says "my mum makes better anyway". When we had a fete at school in September, we had a failsafe sweet stand and the kids loved it. My daughter's 9th birthday went wonderfully - no hyped up kids, a few kids didn't want to come because of the "diet" food, but they missed out. The parents commented on how well they all behaved, even the magician I'd hired couldn't believe how well they played, participated and listened.

My Mum and Dad, Before and After School Care, Church and Girl Guides have been totally supportive of my children’s diets. If they have a party/special day etc they always phone me and either ask me to make food (which I'm more than happy to do) or they will ask for certain recipes and all the kids cook. My mother-in-law‘s "let's not tell mummy and daddy" attitude towards little surprises changed very quickly when she saw how my 9 year old reacted after a "Happy Meal". Ironically, not such a happy time was had!

We have a wonderful restaurant round the corner from home which we used to go to once per month as a treat for the kids – after the diet I phoned them, feeling a little silly, but as long as I tell them what they can make, skinless chicken, sauces etc, they are happy to do it and we haven't had a reaction yet.

At school, even though she has come such a long way in 9 months, my daughter is still being stereotyped by certain teachers, and sadly even the principal thinks she's not being given a fair go. So, we are starting off at a new school in January 2007 and are all looking forward to this change.

So many people told me not to be stupid, not to do all of this work etc, just put her on medication - I work full-time, plus do the normal mum and wife things in the home, but no matter what happens, we won't go back to "normal" eating ever again. I know it mightn't work for everyone, but it has worked for us.

I would like to say to all parents and caregivers, THE EXTRA HARD WORK IS WORTH IT!!! If you slip up, these things happen, just keep going! It has made our lives soooo much happier. To the Schools: help us parents out - stop having so much processed crap to sell the kids, they get used to having homecooked food without the nasties in it and your days will go much smoother. – 'Maitland mother', NSW [Maitland mother would like to get in touch with other failsafers in the Maitland area, please email via suedengate@ozemail.com.au]

[468] Lots of mistakes at first (November 2006)

My daughter Samantha is now eight and has been failsafe for about two years. To begin with we were making a number of errors with the diet and it wasn't until I started referring to your web pages that I was able to better refine the diet and start to work through some of the possible reasons why the diet didn't always seem to be working.

Samantha was always a fairly demanding baby but as she was our first we didn't really know any different. As a toddler she was not the sort of child that was easy to take out to a café for lunch - sitting still wasn't something that she could do, frustrating but I could cope with that and didn't really worry about it.

The first signs that started us thinking were a little eczema after eating dried fruit and complaining of her skin burning after urinating, which seemed to be much worse after eating oranges and tomatoes. At about the same time that we started taking note of these I met someone whose child was failsafe and I started reading about food intolerances. It all started to make sense. Pity that we didn't find your material straight away however we fiddled around eliminating some of the very high foods from her diet. Some improvement on the skin irritations but her behaviour although not extreme was becoming noticeable at times

When Samantha went to school she was displaying some behaviours that were inappropriate. We could never really put our finger on the type of behaviour that she was displaying it was just silly inappropriate behaviour, silly noises, crawling under the desks etc. As she is a bright child we were perplexed about why she couldn't seem to understand and learn how to behave at school. It was at about this time that we discovered your material although it was not a total success straight away. When Samantha eats food that is not failsafe it seems she displays symptoms of oppositional defiance. It took time to realise just how sensitive Samantha is and to sort out some of the common errors we were making.

We are extremely lucky as Samantha is absolutely wonderful about sticking to the diet. I grew up on a farm where my mother did all the cooking so I guess I have learnt pretty good cooking skills. As I now cook just about everything, it does seem to be a bit of a bonus. – by email, Tasmania

[466] Swimming pool chlorine triggers oppositional defiance (November 2006)

Part one: In the last five weeks our son's ODD behaviour has been getting steadily worse. A lot of the time he is fine (with flashes of naughtiness), and then BANG, major, violent tantrum. I have just gone over the diary fairly meticulously and noticed that exactly five weeks ago he started swimming lessons in the local swimming school. The very next day after his first lesson, I noted that he seemed to be a bit irritated, and was a bit irritated on a couple of other days that week.

The following Saturday, after the lesson, I noted that he seemed grumpy, but it was short lived and reappeared off and on a couple of days later. By the Tuesday we had a screaming tantrum (unheard of for weeks and weeks). From there on the irritation was there much more often, and every couple of days he would be in timeout, mouthing off (ODD raising it's ugly head).

The last three weeks have been not good for him (or us) and this morning, I could see it coming on before school and sure enough we had a huge tantrum, where he was threatening to hit me with the toilet brush (he was timing out in the bathroom), he was being really nasty calling me names etc and was out to hurt me. When I got him to school (he had calmed down and was really sorry by then), I had to warn his teacher. I was thinking of taking him out of school until he calms down again, or at least until we find what is causing this.

Could this all be coming from chlorine? Usually after the swimming lesson we would take him to the local pool next day to practice so there's a double dose. He has always swum in our spa and his cousin's pool with no ill effects, however is it possible the swimming school and public pools would be more heavily chlorinated than the normal backyard one?

(Sue: It is common for ODD kids to react badly to chlorine, and yes, the chlorine level in public pools is usually much heavier than home pools. Some people get around it by having the child wear goggles -you can easily absorb toxic chemicals through your eyes - and shower immediately after leaving the pool. Others prefer to swim in fresh water swimming holes, the sea, salt water pools, or low chlorine pools.)

Part two: another look at the diary shows that for the last three weeks we have had a major tantrum on the afternoon following the lesson and then again the next day after the local pool - the reason for the behaviour was staring me in the face, and I didn't see it as I was looking for food triggers.

I have looked back further in the diary, where it showed the last real tantrum was during the last school holidays. I had noted that he had been at the local pool that morning, and lost the plot in the afternoon, so I don't think I need any more proof than that! I wish I had twigged earlier, I kept looking for food reasons. I'm really pleased it wasn't food. – by email, NT

[462] Failsafe homeschooling (November 2006)

My daughter is nine years old now and I intend to keep her home schooled for the rest of her school years. Not only is she behaving better because she eats only failsafe food but her concentration has improved, she enjoys learning and is learning more and is a far happier child as a result. I'd strongly recommend home schooling for parents of kids with ADHD. Before we started home schooling, my daughter exhibited strongly ODD behaviour patterns and was becoming a very unhappy and unsettled little girl. It's so good to see her playing happily with the others and being able to hold a conversation instead of fighting and tormenting.

Socialisation is no problem for us. We are already a large family, however, we organise outside activities as well. Our kids do a horsemanship course (their choice) as well as other activities that bring them into contact with others. Last year we tried our daughter with ballet for a while but would have been better with all-in wrestling. This year she's doing trampolining. It's more her style. Largely, I think that kids in schools get too much of the one kind of socialisation. I personally think they develop better if they learn to socialise with people across all age groups.

To get permission to home school is easy, in NSW you download the application forms from the Board of Studies website, fill them in and send them, but there are a few things that need to be in place.

Firstly, you need to develop a plan of what you are going to teach. To help with this, the website of the Board of Studies has a site that tells what subjects have to be taught and what sort of components in each subject you need to address. It's the normal school curriculum that has to be followed. I found this a bit worrying at first but it ended up being fairly easy. I am a trained primary school teacher which did of course make things much easier, but I found the greatest amount of help from other home schooling parents on the internet. You do not have to be a teacher to home school but you do need to develop a pretty good program. I'm pleased to say that the Board of Studies has approved the programs that I've written for my girls and has asked if I would help other homeschooling parents in my area, which I do and I'd be happy to help 'failsafers' with theirs if they need it.- Chris (vwilder@optusnet.com.au).

[452] One liners 2 (August 2006)

I am another recent convert - my almost 5 year old was always difficult in terms of behaviour and the term oppositional defiance describes her well - when we cut out preservatives after seeing you on TV last year she improved heaps (no more threats of violence). Since then I have borrowed one of your books and now we don't touch flavours, colours or preservatives, WOW what a difference - I will most likely do the elimination diet in the near future to pinpoint other possible issues like salicylates etc.

[410] Thank you so much for giving us our darling little man to us (May 2006)

I was lucky enough to come and see you talk recently. Our son is nearly 8 years old and I reckon for 7 of those years he has been very hard to handle, episodes involving throwing things at me, chasing me, yelling, getting so upset he would go blue and lose his breath. We have taken him off a lot of foods you recommend not to give your children, and his behaviour improved, episodes consisted of whingeing or crying for 10 minutes instead of hours. Since seeing your talk, we have cut out a lot more foods, and I have stopped using my beloved Red Door perfume, within a week we have seen an amazingly different child, he now sits with us, not hyperactive, yes mum, no mum. I said to my husband I am overwhelmed as for the past 7 years I have known a naughtier child. We both want to thank you so much for giving us our darling little man to us. We have the opportunity to give him a better way of feeling and acting, it is all to you, although I miss my perfume, I have now given it to my mum and my husband and I are enjoying some special days with our child. We now only feed him fresh foods - no processed foods, home made cooking for school lunches. Thank you so very much - parent, Victoria.

[407] My children were on an extremely healthy diet (March 2006)

After failsafeing my children we have seen a great improvement in their behaviour. My eldest daughter (nearly 5yrs) was diagnosed with ODD. She is so much happier and easier to live with since being on the diet. My youngest daughter had dry eczema on her arms that has all but disappeared. Both of my children were on what would have been considered an extremely healthy diet (fit for life) with very little junk food and loads of fruit and vegetables. They have both improved considerably over the four or five months on the diet. Thanks for the work you have done in making us aware of what really is in our food. We have tried many things to help our eldest daughter with little success and were at our wits end. Food has turned out to be a big key. Now some of the other methods we had previously tried (eg. reward charts) actually work. If we have a slip on the diet it's like a wall goes up in her mind and she can't listen anymore. – Belinda, by email

[405] Two years ago, I refused to give up ‘healthy’ foods (March 2006)

About two years ago, I attended one of your seminars in Christchurch, NZ. When I first entered the room, I remember seeing information on foods to avoid including broccoli, avocado and olives. I was shocked. Not only were these my son’s favourite foods but they were healthy. I listened, watched the videos and felt these were all good descriptions of my difficult boy ... but I was not stopping him from eating "healthy foods"! Two years later and Shaun (not his real name) is now 10. During this time, his behaviour at school has deteriorated and he is having a tough time. Despite being an excellent reader and achieving high maths results, he cannot spell, his writing is messy and he finds it hard to stay on task. He annoys other children and is very defiant towards teachers. At home he can be demanding, argumentative, sulky and has low motivation. Last week I remembered the book "Fed Up" I had bought and pretty much shelved. I pulled it out and was surprised that two years ago I had highlighted the symptoms for Oppositional Defiance listed on page 3. It was an exact description of Shaun. He even agreed that’s how he felt.

Shaun has now been on the elimination diet for a week. On the first day of the diet, Shaun did a homework sheet for me in 5 minutes that normally would take him 15 to complete only half with lots of moaning and groaning. His writing seemed to be better. His teacher has noticed that he has more self control, and is doing his work. Shaun says he feels happier at school. Is it possible to see behaviour improve this quickly? I am really hoping that this will work because our lives have been very stressed. – by email, NZ [this family was already additive-free, which generally leads to quicker results]

[403] 210: Benzoates are his worst enemy (March 2006)

My 4.5yr old son has been our biggest challenge. All his problems are proving to be food related – it's amazing. His issues are aggression, ODD, poor impulse control, argumentative, continual congestion and ear infections (2 lots of grommets), continual rashes, blotches, sore tummies, burning anus, bloating, bedwetting etc, all of which are being controlled now by diet. We had been giving him decongestants, antihistamines, nasal sprays and antibiotics since the day I stopped breastfeeding him at 6 months ... He was a wild little boy but we've now found out that benzoates are his worst enemy. His nose his dry now and needs no medication. – by email, NSW

[362] Generally unwell throughout life (March 2005)

I am a retired RN and I have three daughters and three young granddaughters. Throughout my life I have visited many doctors complaining of bowel problems, nausea, vomiting and feeling generally unwell, only to be told on frequent occasions and after many investigations, that it was all in my head. As a child I can recall frequently feeling very unwell and being diagnosed as having had "bilious attacks', however I can now attribute the cause of these episodes to an intolerance to natural food chemicals.

Because I enjoy cooking I often browse through recipe books in the shops and this is how, some years ago, I came across a copy of 'Friendly Food'. After browsing through it I realised that this book described symptoms which sounded very like mine. Maybe it wasn't in my head after all! I requested a referral from my GP to RPAH Allergy Clinic and after undertaking the elimination diet, my dietician at the clinic concluded that I was very sensitive to salicylates and I also had some milder reactions to quite a few other substances but not amines.

It is now quite a few years since I was diagnosed and I am delighted that there is now a website and also your great Failsafe Cookbook for guidance. The oldest of my granddaughters has recently been "tamed" from oppositional defiance disorder by using the Failsafe Diet. She is now quite a different child, no longer having restless legs, eczema, or being uncontrollable or defiant. Although she is only five years old she is quite happy to comply with the failsafe food because she now feels so much better. My three daughters all recognise that they do have problems with some foods so it appears that I have unfortunately handed down the problem to both generations.

I am now without too many problems although trying to modify my diet when I attended Weight Watchers was a bit of challenge. However, I did eventually manage to lose 10kg. When travelling to UK and the States I have always come home feeling very much the worse for wear due to food intolerances so I am delighted to see that there are now failsafe contacts overseas should I venture forth again one day. Getting people to understand food intolerances is always a problem and I am now quite used to being asked to say exactly what food items I am allergic to and then I try, often without success, to explain the difference between food intolerances and allergy. I am sure that your glossy brochures will be very useful for this. - Jane Hoad, NSW

[371] A reaction to instant noodles as seen by a psychologist (July 2005)

I am a psychologist working with families who require help with their children's behaviour. I have done a number of home visits with a particular family where the mother is honestly as close to the "perfect parent" as you will ever get. There is nothing I can offer her as a psych in terms of behaviour management, as she is doing everything exactly as I'd recommend. The child I am seeing is four and has Asperger's. His sister, who mum thinks is harder to cope with because she is more unpredictable, is 7ish and has ODD behaviours but not all the time - the kind of kid who goes from angel to nightmare "for no apparent reason". I recently did a home visit and I have never seen anything like it. The girl was sitting there with me chatting away happily, fantastic manners, considerate, playing with her younger brother which such patience etc. Mum fed her homebrand two minute noodles with chicken seasoning ... I kid you not, within 15 minutes, this little angel turned into a whining, defiant, out of it kid who was climbing on furniture, pushing and hitting her brother, screaming in frustration at absolutely nothing and demanding more noodles. She traced some numbers and mum was taken back by her carelessness and messy job, which she said occurs periodically. It was quite astounding, and I wish I had been able to get that on camera! - by email.

[358] 'Worst Christmas Day' letter (December 2004)

'I read as much as I could on the internet site and ordered your books after a very very BAD Christmas Day with my son Nathan (not his real name). Although we really don't eat that much junk, I was surprised at the number of bad additives in ordinary food. In particular, Christmas goodies are laden with additives!'

As well as additives, Christmas treats of dried fruit and seasonal summer fruits are high in natural food chemicals called salicylates, likely to be a big problem for oppositional kids. I asked Nathan's mother for more details. Luckily, there's a happy ending. Here's her fascinating story:

'On Christmas morning, Nathan (12) was in already in a bad mood. The day before, he had pigged out on grapes and plums - but I didn't really think at that time that that could have been the issue - I mean they were healthy!!! We also had Grandma staying with us, and I think she probably spoiled them a little during her stay with lollies and soft drinks.

On Christmas Day, we were at the other grandparents' place and Nathan's behaviour was getting worse. He was eating the normal Christmas food - chips (BBQ and Sour Cream and Chives), mixed lollies, but particularly red and green M&Ms, rumballs with lots of raisins and dried fruit, plum pudding, custard (artificial colours 110 & 102), sausages, and drinking cans of soft drink one after the other.

Nathan was egging the other boys on to create havoc. After a couple of time outs things seemed to be OK.We were ignoring the bad and hoping that he would come to his senses and enjoy the day.When he sat next to me to look at some old photos, I suggested to him that he needed to apologise (BAD MISTAKE!!). He didn't think he had to and threw a temper tantrum and a chair to the ground. Poppy decided that enough was enough and proceeded to smack him (BIGGER MISTAKE!!).Needless to say the smacking did nothing but fire poor Nathan up and he decided to run away.

The last time he ran away, it took me nearly 3 hours to find him and he had travelled nearly 15kms. This time luckily it didn't take that long. We had a cool down time together and I managed to get him back to Grandma's in a quiet, subdued mood.

It was Christmas Eve that I ordered your books, after crying out of frustration and despair. They arrived in the new year, and after reading the books, I think that there were two things that triggered it off - one was the pigging out on that fruit and the other was all that junk food.

We didn't go the whole hog with elimination diet - at this stage - but what we have done is followed the 'additives to avoid' card and also limited the types of fruit, sticking mainly with red delicious apples, pears and Cavendish bananas. For the last four weeks of the school holidays, all 4 of our boys (and us) enjoyed a peaceful school holidays. They still argue like boys do, but are not spiteful or aggressive - they're more likely to settle it peacefully.

So now I make bikkies, sausage rolls (which all the boys and hubby love) and I even make my own cordial. Generally if they have something with additives we can see the difference the next day ... Nathan develops a 'hard done by' attitude, and starts yelling at his brothers. He was probably the worst of the four boys, but all had their bad days.

Best of all is that Nathan is smiling more now - he used to be such a misery guts. We've also switched to A2 milk as both the boys had to have soy formula milk when they were little. I noticed the difference in one of the others when we didn't bother to get it one week - he was cranky and irritable. As well, their asthma seems to have disappeared.

I am now convinced of the diet. Even hubby who was initially sceptical but supportive - he knew that something needed to be done - is convinced, and happy to eat his 'bad' food away from home.' - by email

[342] Depression: Helpless, hopeless depression due to salicylates (Sept 2004)

I have suffered depression since at least age 15 and am 38 now. I self medicated on huge amounts of alcohol over the years, and was always very emotional and explosive. Either very 'up' or totally down and in a complete mess.

When I fell pregnant at age 29, I sank into a deep depression that only worsened with a long labour and breastfeeding difficulties. I was prescribed Prozac and stayed on this medication for seven years during which time I tried to come off twice with very bad results.

I did a lot of counseling and support group work regarding childhood abuse issues, relationship and communication counseling work with my husband, and received the assistance of a social worker with trying to manage mothering my child. My daughter was three before I received this assistance and also started to work through my own emotional issues. It took until she was six before I came across Sue's information about diet. My daughter always had Oppositional Defiant Disorder behaviours and was not interested in learning at school or at home, but it had been presumed that it was I who was not coping. Which I wasn't anyway, to top it off! ODD people can appear so normal to others making me seem quite neurotic.

I came off antidepressants again at the beginning of last year after having felt very level for quite a few months in a row. It was a very rocky 12 months. At times I was OK and at others I thought I would not survive unless I went back on the drugs. At least my husband was far more understanding at this point, but I wouldn't have called it a life.

I know now that we (my daughter and I) had been bouncing off each other for years. Her behaviour and concentration improved enormously on the diet. It has changed our lives. We laugh, play, cuddle and talk together instead of constant aggression and fighting. I cannot remember ever being so level and calm and capable. I cried with joy (or over the loss?) one night when she was just so caring towards me. Of course we still have bad times. Everyone does after all. Now we have good times too.

When we tested salicylates, as soon as I woke the next day I could feel the return of my helpless, hopeless, awful black depression. I wanted to strike out at others in my pain. Once again I couldn't think straight to make even the simplest of decisions. I hated myself and anyone that I loved. It took about five days before I started to come up again. I don't ever want to feel like that again and I know what causes it now. To be able to say that feels so good. I have some form of control over a life that was totally out of control. I find the diet very hard in some ways, but I know which I prefer. To maintain my life in any reasonably happy form, I need to be failsafe. - reader, Vic

[317] 'Absolutely foul' to 'wonderful' 13 year old in three weeks (April 2004)

We are trying the failsafe diet for my 13-year-old nephew, Lachlan, who has come to live with us. Lachlan has ADHD and I believe a huge dose of oppositional defiance as well as Aspergers and I am finding him unmanageable. We noticed a bit of an improvement on the first 3 days of our failsafe diet but he then reverted to absolutely foul - defiant and oppositional!!

Two weeks later… I think that Lachlan's behaviour is better overall but I still get defiance at times. We have been on the diet for 3 weeks now and he has been off his dex for 1 week. He says he doesn't notice any difference, but I do.

Three days later … We had a wonderful day with Lachlan yesterday - so different from our daily experience a couple of weeks ago. I have decided to leave Lachlan off his medication indefinitely at this stage as he seems to be a much nicer person when not taking it. He even seems to be understanding some of the basic maths concepts that were just beyond his grasp in the past. - reader, Qld.

[301] Oppositional defiance (December 2003)

After months of struggling with my 4½ y.o. son's behaviour, I stumbled upon the www.fedup.com.au website. I have refused to believe suggestions (from carers etc) that he has ADD. My son is very bright and intelligent, and I simply did not want him medicated unnecessarily. Now that I have found this website and the information on oppositional defiance (which describes my son to a T!) I have a place to start. I have started to cut foods high in additives from his diet and have already noticed a change in his behaviour after only a couple of weeks. The really good thing is that after I explained to him that his bad behaviour could be caused by these things in food, he has been quite happy to not eat them, and even asks me first to check if there is anything bad in his food. I am so grateful for the website. - Reader, NSW

[290] At last I have a name for my son's behaviour (September 2003)

After reading your book Fed Up, at last I can put a name to my 10 year old ADHD son's bad behaviour: oppositional defiance. I know that he reacts to preservatives and have tried to avoid obvious food colours but this is not enough to make a difference so I am going to try the failsafe diet.- by email

[250] "Best information regarding asthma" (April 2003)

My second daughter (aged 7½), has always been the most 'difficult' one of my three children. Over the years we have had to put up with regular tantrums, defiance, rudeness and out of proportion reactions when things didn't go her own way. She also often complained of tummy aches and had little energy.

In early 2002 I read Sue Dengate's book 'Fed Up'. What I read described my daughter exactly. I discovered there is a name for her behaviour - oppositional defiance - and that it can be caused by intolerance to artificial or natural food chemicals. Our family decided to do an elimination diet using 'The Failsafe Cookbook' for guidance. We discovered that our daughter reacts severely to certain food colours and preservatives found in some breads and other food products. She also has an intolerance to natural food chemicals called salicylates.

The change in our diet has been enough to make a huge difference in our daughter's behaviour. She is now a happy, co-operative member of our family. She has a lot more energy and no longer overreacts when things don't go her way.

Asthma has also been a problem in our family. "Fed Up with Asthma" has given me the best information regarding asthma triggers and medications that I have ever read. Amazingly, in the six months since that we have been eating failsafe foods, no one in our family has suffered an asthma attack. - Alice, NT

[230] I felt I had a potential psychopath on my hands (February 2003)

I am 42 and live in Sydney with my husband and 2 children. My story centres around my son, Alex who is now 6 years old. Alex is a little toughy, one of those kids who is highspeed, enthusiastic, in your face, adventuresome etc (and that's with a positive spin on his life).

He was born 2 weeks early, but a big boofy boy at 4kg. For the first 6 months he was a wonderfully placid calm child. Feed well, slept well, grew well, didn't seem to cry - dream baby. (Apart from having chicken pox, bronchiolitis and 2 fits in this period he was healthy and strong - though perhaps these illness should have given me a clue).

At six months he suddenly became incredibly restless - people would comment on him being active and a real 'tiger' - Looking back 3 things changed at this time - he started solids, started formula and he started daycare. I also remember noticing his face change. He had had a beautiful round baby face with bright blue eyes, and when he started on solids he got dark circles and creases under the eyes, and his eyes turned green - I remember crying at the loss of my beautiful baby boy.

His first year in day care was diabolical. In a class of 15 babies, with 4 carers they could not cope with Alex. He walked at 9 months and spent his time running around the other babies (that were still immobile) snatching toys, jumping on the babies, shrieking, and escaping - he seemed incredibly bright and had the mobility of a child at least 6 months older. Every evening I was met with the litany of what he had done that day to terrorise the class. The carers always looked frazzled and worn out. Their only solution was to give continuous time out as a unishment - he spent hours every day in a cot that he eventually broke - at the time I lived through it thinking it must get better - in hindsight I see their approach as completely inappropriate - he was too young to be punished - it didn't help to modify his behavior, rather it set it in stone.

He continued through daycare being rough and ready, and some days violent - he found their order and routine hard to take. When he wanted to run in the garden, he had to listen to the story, when he wanted to keep painting, he was told painting time was finished - the structure and lack of freedom drove him mad. And this was a university based childcare with great facilities and high staff to student numbers!!

Our life at home was crazy as well. It was like living with Jekyll and Hyde. Sometimes he would be a delight, other days he would be totally uncontrollable - usually incredibly defiant - he could stick to his point hour in hour out - it was impossible to win an argument - normal parenting didn't seem to work. He also had a habit of making loud repetitive noises.

Going out was a nightmare - he would run away, run into traffic, swear at strangers, try to strangle other children, and on a really bad day would threaten to kill people. There were many times when I felt that I had a potential psychopath or serial killer on my hands. Another characteristic was that he couldn't be told anything - he always wanted to learn first hand.

Harm minimisation seemed to be the best policy - I taught him to cook, use knives safely, chop wood with an axe, use power tools etc at a very young age - on the basis that he was going to find and use these items anyway, no matter what I did to try and stop him. Although he had a few accidents (mainly burns from cooking) this strategy has meant that he is still alive.

At 3 we discovered he had asthma, and glue ear - he had his first set of grommets inserted and could finally hear. At that stage I thought the hearing was the answer to all his behavioral problems, and I am sure he must have felt better being able to hear (Since then we have had another 3 sets of grommets inserted). He also changed to a community based, child centred pre-school/school which was far better for him. They worked with what he wanted to do and let him learn and explore at his own pace. The other children were attracted to him in an odd way - they were always excited to see what daring deed or brilliant idea he had - he never lacked for incredible ideas or enthusiasm. Despite this, successful social interaction and aggression was still an issue, and friendships were dicey due to his unpredictability.

Another habit he had was ticcing - eye tics, snorting, touching other children, kicking - At 4 he was diagnosed with Tourettes by a paediatrican. (I followed up later with a neurologist who specialised in Tourettes who said that he was just a naughty boy who needed counselling).

I was also seeing the local health centre psychologist -but this seemed to be no more than a chance for me to talk - never really got to address Alex's needs.

Interestingly I found his behavior was always better in winter, and was diabolical by term 4 (I now think this is fruit related!).

By the end of pre-school several parents had started a petition to get him removed from the school - luckily I had the support of the teachers and many other parents and this was stopped dead in its tracks.

I noticed that there were several different levels to his behavior - what I think of as 'full on' and then 'psycho'. I noticed that he became psycho after certain drinks - being sceptical about colour related behavior I started to read the labels whenever he went truly demented and psychotic - of course you can guess what I found - 102 At the time I had no idea that other people knew it was bad - I just thought I had the only child in the world who reacted to yellow colour - particularly as the popular wisdom of the day all said that red colour was the problem. So for the last 2 years I have avoided 102 - this helped a bit - but not totally.

The local health centre's counsellor visited the school and reported that his behavior was Oppositional Defiant - first time I had ever heard of it. The solution was to maximise his 'good interactions' - so once again no real help, and leaving it up to me to be a better parent.

Alex started school at the same child-centred preschool/school last year - he had a reasonably good year but was chronically sick - temperatures, stomach aches, head aches. However as he is so hyperactive, he often didn't realise he was sick, and I had to fight to get doctors to look at him. For example, I took him to hospital with severe asthma/croup - however as he was running around casualty making chicken noises he was not seen to as a priority case - when they finally looked at him, his oxygen levels were dangerously low and he was gasping for breath.

Another time we sat in a waiting room, left till last as he was jumping on chairs (and apparently well) - when he was finally seen the doctor couldn't believe he was racing around - his temperature was 41 and he had acute tonsillitis and a ear infection. He also had a severe salmonella infection last year and was losing considerable quantities of blood, but because of his high energy levels I was told it was just gastro and I was exaggerating his symptoms - it was finally diagnosed as salmonella and he had 2 weeks off recovering - I now know that when Alex is sick I have to force doctors to look for the worst. While I know he is ill, to anyone else he seems too full of beans to be sick - time and time again the doctors have been surprised when some odd illness turns up (ie scarlet fever, pneumonia, bronchiolitis, to name just a few)

At the end of last year I took Alex to yet another pediatrician - this time about his health - after a year of infections and unexplained temperatures I was thinking that there was something seriously wrong - he took his medical history and noted his pallor, and dark circles under his eyes - and pronounced food intolerance!!!

In December I started him on the diet given to me by this doctor - we removed milk, honey, colours and preservatives - and were told he could eat fruit, vegies and only cold pressed oil.

So - no result - if anything he became worse. While I thank this doctor for pointing me in the direction of food intolerance, his diet did nothing to help. A family friend recommended your cookbook to my mum. Since then I have spent the holidays reading Fed Up, and the cookbook and going failsafe.

We have cut out diary, amines, salicylates, and all the artificial additives, colours, preservatives etc. My mum has been a fantastic support. She is making all the 'extras' ie: jams, mayonaise, biscuits etc. Without her I couldn't have achieved so much. She also rings up food companies and asks them to clarify what their ingredients are, and what type of oil they are using! We haven't taken out gluten yet - not sure whether it is necessary.

And Alex? It has taken a while, but by the end of the holiday he was so much better. He was able to play consistently with children without it erupting into a major argument. Parents and friends have noticed the difference. I have also noticed that he is now able to be disciplined. He can hear what I am saying and understands when his behavior is wrong and I can now win an argument.

Last week was the first week back at school - first day was fantastic and I received lots of comment about how he changed. Then he started cheating and eating roll ups, muesli bars, chocolate cake and sweets from his friends - by the weekend he was making repetitive noises, chatting constantly, being selfish, crying and was unable to control himself. He visited a friend on the weekend, who had seen him a week before in his good phase, and she couldn't believe the difference - she is now a convert to the idea of food intolerance. In her words it is like he is on a drug trip, and we all just have to wait for him to come 'down'.

So we are back trying to get him adhering to his diet again - he says he wants to - I just have to wait and see. I want to get him back to the point where we can try some controlled challenges!

And the rest of the family? None of us are totally failsafe yet, and are all cheating when we are out, but I believe we all have symptoms that warrant the diet. My 9 yr old daughter is incredibly artistic, but unable to read, and has temper tantrums, I suffer migraines, mood swings, arthritis and occasional depression. Interestingly, my daughter did some market research for a new hyper flavoured snack food a few weeks ago. She came home in an uncontrollable rage to the point that she was throwing herself around the house kicking furniture etc. I have never seen her like that before - and just think, those snacks are about to do that to all our kids - it's criminal. - reader, Sydney

[216] "Had to walk out of the house" (October 2002)

My daughter is 3.5 years old. Last year when she was 2 years old she had two nights where she only slept for 2 hours, and was a flailing, intolerable child. I literally had to walk out of the house, I was very close to losing it. I realised that this reaction was likely caused by the 'party foods' she had eaten for the first time at a playgroup Christmas party. I took her to the doctor, and was then referred to a paediatrician, and then onto a child psychologist. The psychologist agreed that her diet needed to be taken into account, as she was a very busy little girl, who never stopped, and never slept much. But the sudden outburst of defiance had me worried. He gave us practical advice, and we went on our way. Six months ago, a friend gave me your book 'Fed Up'. During the first two weeks of the elimination diet, our little devil turned into an angel … - by email

[155] A Brush with Pizza Snack Biscuits (June 2002)

My sons are severely food and chemical intolerant. Their diets are severely restricted, just to enable them to cope with day to day life. Their adherence to the restricted diet literally enables them to survive. We avoid additives in food at all costs, and we avoid chemicals wherever possible as they affect the boys equally to the wrong food choices. They are aged 6 and 3.

My eldest son has commenced school and is in Year 1. Considering his dietary challenges, he copes with food and school incredibly well – but there have been and will always be the occasional slip ups. Pressure from peers is already impacting and will continue to do so as he journeys towards adulthood.

Late in the Kindergarten year, he was with some team mates after a Teeball game. He was eating his customary rice and drinking plain water whilst the other kids were tucking into soft drink and a box of pizza snack biscuits – the kind people might eat with dip. He was fairly unfazed as he is used to it, but the problem kicked in when he had finished – still hungry - and the others still had plenty to eat. He resisted their offering and the temptation to indulge until they reached the bottom of the box. It was then that he succumbed to the hunger and I daresay, the curiosity, (he has never eaten them before!) and he ate some crumbs from the box – less than would cover a 10 cent piece. He later remarked that he didn't even like how they tasted!

Within 3 hours, the reaction started. He was due to go to a birthday party – I always stay with him for moral support because he can't indulge in what others enjoy at parties – and as we arrived, the rot began to set in! He was no longer able to communicate with me in the way he usually would. His responses to questions were more a grunt than a reply. I had to physically manipulate his face to make eye contact with him and get his attention – and his eyes were wild!

He generally perspires freely even though he is only 6, but now he was perspiring profusely. His shirt, hat and shorts looked like the ones on Pat Rafter after a 5 set Final – and this is truly without exaggeration. He was soaked. He was moving in an agitated manner- his actions were jerky rather than smooth, and he was lashing out at things and people. He became surly and very defiant. He was irrational when compared to his usual behaviours. He hurt 4 friends at the party in 4 separate incidents whilst playing tips on and around some playground equipment. I had been observing and intervening – there was nothing malicious, but he had lost his finesse and the ability to be able to judge the other kids level of involvement. He had become face blind – oblivious to their anxiety and distress, and unable to see that they wished to cease the game. His need to continue the game was insatiable.

For the first time ever, these kids were actually scared of him and what he was doing, and they thought he had hurt them on purpose. He was at this point doing some real damage to the fragile relationships he had worked so hard to develop. The area the party was conducted in was also open to the public, and my son managed to get into 3 fights with slightly older boys he had never met before. In each instance, both parties were equally at fault, however the new children seemed to take an instant dislike to his overall behaviour and this was the impetus for the conflict. He was now unable to make good judgements about his actions and he took offence at the situation. Instead of altering his behaviours to become more socially acceptable, he lashed out and hit the other child –

and so the fights began. My time was spent alternating between apologising to everyone profusely, heading his ill-considered choices off at the pass and repairing his crumbling relationships whilst helping out his inadvertent victims – his mates were suffering his horrendous reaction to flavour enhancers, flavours and preservatives vicariously.

Going home was no better – we were only two hours into the reaction and things weren't going to get better in a hurry. I tried to keep him doing things outside to wear off as much energy as I could. Something happened and he was hurt. I think he took a bump on a tooth that was threatening to come out, but was nowhere near ready just yet. The bump made the tooth a little looser and it bled. I tried to soothe him and clean the blood without his knowledge, as blood worries him. It was no use because he became hysterical. His hysteria was very different to his usual teary fussing (as many 6 year olds do when in need of TLC). He began to scream and squeal a very high pitched squeal, he was rocking and flapping, he was panicking, he wanted comfort but kept pushing me away and he interspersed the screams and squeals with frenetic pleas of 'Help me! Help me!' He was inconsolable and it took me more than 1 ½ hours to calm him down to a reasonable state. He then continued to rock and sob on my lap.

Without the pizza shape irritants in his body, I would have been able to calm him right down within half an hour and he would not have exhibited the rocking, flapping and squealing behaviours (which are found on the Autism Spectrum along with face blindness and tactile defensivity – not wanting his personal space invaded, oversensitivity to touch, pushing me away despite wanting comfort). He also would not have pushed me away after the initial pain subsided. Consequently, he distressed his baby brother and his father – the whole house had been disrupted by the ingestion of the miniscule dose of pizza shapes only hours earlier.

The next phase of the reaction involved him not being able to go to sleep, and then once finally asleep, waking all through the night. He finally succumbed to sleep at 11.30pm after his usual Catapres dose and some Panadol several hours earlier. His body was still too irritated to properly settle down. Massage was useless because now he was oversensitive to touch. Whilst asleep, he did not lie still all night. He was thumping, wriggling, tossing and squirming all night. You could not say he had a restful evening and neither did we.

He was awake at about 6 am despite his late and unsettled night and the irritated, angry behaviours commenced immediately. He had an argument with his brother over the TV that ended in a fight, because he couldn't step back and get help to sort it out without using his hands and body. He was physically and verbally aggressive and violent. His defiance was escalating and every single thing that went on in the day was a bone of contention. If we said it was black, he swore that it was white despite any evidence to the contrary. If his brother looked at one of his toys, or dared go near his bedroom door, then he hit him without even blinking. I spent this day diverting, refereeing and taking my son out of the house to separate everyone and try to reduce the exponentially increasing stress levels. Bedtime was no better tonight either.

He also began to exhibit physical symptoms today. He now had patches of eczema under his armpits – these only ever appear when he is reacting to something – he had a pre eczema scale – like ichthyosis - all over his torso that he constantly scratched at. He had heartburn, his belching increased, he had wind that you could hear in his digestive tract, he had ‘allergic shiners’ (large dark circles under his eyes), he had greyish skin tone, he had a red burn mark with skin peeling off his behind from the irritants passing through his digestive tract and burning him as it went. There was nothing I could use to relieve his discomfort as nothing would stay on his skin. These physical symptoms would remain until his body was finally clear of what he had ingested.

Upon waking the following day, it was still evident that the aggression was present, although a little milder than yesterday. I managed to encourage him to have some solitary play in his room. He was still irrational and oversensitive and not coping and lashing out. By the time school began, he was in tears clinging to my legs. He was suffering terrific mood swings and his anxiety levels had really increased – he becomes very anxious when his body is compromised by the wrong foods or chemicals and this directly affects his behaviours too. I let his teacher know and organised to collect him early as I knew a whole day of school would be too much. His ability to perform his work had significantly decreased compared to the week before and he needed much more support to complete tasks. His behaviours in the playground were more frenetic and wild, but fortunately he didn’t get into any scrapes that might be finished physically.

In the afternoon, he exploded again – tiredness and the pizza shapes a volatile combination. I rode a rollercoaster of violence, verbal abuse, screaming, aggression, hugs and apologies. It was all I could do to get the situation calm enough for us all to co-exist when Dad got home from work. Unsettled sleep was still an issue. This pattern of morning irritation, school, early pickup, irrationality, abuse and calm continued for another 6 days before things significantly improved. It was a hell of a long time to suffer for such a piddling amount of additive laden Pizza biscuits! Another unfortunate feature that reared its ugly head during this horror period was a return to very negative self image; calling himself stupid and an idiot, saying and believing that no-one liked him and no-one loved him, and believing that his friends didn’t like him anymore either. When he has a reaction like this, he believes he is not a good person. This is a very heavy burden for such a small person, but it has been a part of his reaction pattern since he began to speak. When he was eating a lot more foods when very small - before we had pinpointed the problem (and life was hell for everyone), he would sometimes self harm and sometimes even say ‘I wish I was dead’. It is a very scary and affronting thing to hear your two year old say, "I’m a yucky person! I wish I was dead!"

I always take great pains to point out the wonderful things about him and his achievements and I try to provide lots of situations where he will feel success, but it is undermined very quickly when something like the pizza biscuit incident occurs.

Oh, and what additives were in the box? A combination of at least four glutamate flavour enhancers, some colours, added flavours, vegetable fat (that is likely to contain one of the harmful antioxidants but which doesn’t have to be listed because it represents less than 10 percent of the final product), cheese powder (also usually has added flavour enhancer in the manufacturing), spices… I think anyone reading this will get the picture!

What can be learned from this horrible but true story?

- Food additives DO hurt children.

- Food additives vicariously affect others.

- Possible reactions are many and varied. If you're lucky, you may only exhibit a few minor irritations. If you are unlucky, it will affect your whole life until you can overcome the dosage.

- Physical, mental, social and emotional health can be affected equally.

- Reactions are dose related. The more you have, the more likely you are to suffer a reaction.

- Reactions are individual, and depend on your tolerance.

- Society eventually pays for the individuals who cannot cope with the additives in their diet but are not aware of the connection: mental illness, conduct disorder, depression, drug dependency, costly and often ineffective medication to treat a sufferer's great variety of symptoms, property damage, incidents of rage, family and relationship breakdown, compensation paid to people who end up the innocent victims of others who themselves are really the victims of the food industry… All of this has a cost, whether just an emotional one, or a monetary one. Incarceration of food 'victims' is yet another cost – and one better spent in prevention and better health outcomes for all.

Many of the additives now permitted for use in our foods were not permitted as recently as 5 years ago. If we didn't need them in our food then, and they can have a harmful effect on children and adults alike, then WHY are we allowing them into our food now?! - Sheryl, ACT

[153] Nicholas: Our Six Year Journey (June 2002)

Our family is what is commonly referred to as a "blended family". When we were arried in January 1992, Steve inherited a "package deal" which included my two children, auren and Mark, from my first marriage. Nicholas was born in October 1993.

Our six-year journey with Nicholas began early in 1996 when he was almost three. We were living in Wagga Wagga. Steve and I were in our late thirties, and Lauren and Mark were 13 and 10 respectively.

We are a Defence Force family, which means we are required move around a fair bit. This also means that we endure complications and added stresses that most non-transient families can only begin to imagine.

When Nicholas was born he came into this world in the usual way, a normal pregnancy, and no problems during labour or childbirth. He was a completely normal child in every way until around the age of three. He started to become difficult to manage from a behavioural point of view.

I was 30 weeks pregnant at that time, with Elise, and due to complications I was confined to bed for the last 10 weeks of my pregnancy. Steve was not allowed to take leave so we had to fly my mum down from Brisbane to help out for the first five weeks, and then for the last five weeks we had Steve's parents, also from Brisbane, stay with us to help out until I was back on my feet. We put Nicholas' bad behaviour down to having to cope with different people, different sets of rules, different ways of doing things etc. and told ourselves that everything would return to normal in time.

Elise was born in August and things did not improve. I mentioned Nicholas' behaviour to the clinic sister when I took Elise to be weighed and measured, and she felt that perhaps he was feeling neglected because his new baby sister was taking a lot of the attention way from him. We enrolled him into preschool. We felt that perhaps if he were to ecome involved in something special just for him, something to improve his self-esteem, his behaviour would improve.

He settled into preschool really well and thoroughly enjoyed it. He was always very well behaved at preschool but the behaviour at home did not improve. This became the pattern of our lives for the next six years. He became obsessive about little things such as his bath. It was either too hot or too cold. It didn't really matter what temperature it was, it was just never the way he wanted it no matter what we did.

We survived fairly well for the rest of that year and remained in Wagga Wagga until the end of 1997. Nicholas' behaviour did not get any worse, nor did it improve. We told ourselves that since we seemed to skip the terrible two's that perhaps this was just a bad case of the terrible three's instead. I hasten to add that I did not experience any of these behaviours with Lauren or Mark, nor did I go through much in the way of the terrible two's with them. Lauren and Mark were always very well behaved both in the home, and out and about, so this was a whole new experience for me.

At the end of 1997 Steve was posted to Darwin, and we spent an enjoyable Christmas with our families in Brisbane en route. We arrived in Darwin in mid January of 1998 and this is where our journey really started to get rough.

Nicholas started preschool five mornings a week and he became very tired with no energy. We put the tiredness and low energy levels down to the humidity and extreme heat of the tropics and the fact that up until our move to Darwin, he had lived all of his life in a cold climate. Nicholas was born in Canberra, and had spent the past two years living in Wagga Wagga before moving to Darwin. He started to lose weight, which we put down to the fact that Steve is very tall and that Nicholas had inherited the "tall" gene and was starting to grow. We decided he was going to be a tall, skinny child and didn't think too much more about it. The behaviour was getting steadily worse but still only at home and never at preschool.

In March of 1998, I decided it was time to take Nicholas to the doctor because he was now 3½, still a bed wetter at night, and still no improvement in his behaviour. We were referred to one of Darwin's best paediatricians. Nicholas had an ultra sound done on his bladder to rule out any nasties. This indicated that he had a large bladder capacity, which meant that he should be able to store the urine and make it through the night without any problems. Our paediatrician only ever used medication as a last resort after exploring all other options, and we were in total agreement of this. It was decided to put Nicholas back into night nappies, which we did, and given a bit more time and maturity, hopefully things would fall into place.

Initially, the bed-wetting was the bigger concern and the behaviour was secondary. Gradually, the priorities were reversed. Nicholas' energy levels deteriorated and his weight loss continued. The dreadful behaviours worsened. As time went on all these things became serious issues. The volume of urine each night was no longer contained in the night nappy, and the behaviour went from bad to worse, to down right disgusting, with many violent outbursts. He became more obsessive. He had to have the yellow bowls and plates in our multi coloured dinner set, and he had to have his shoelaces the exact same length. If he didn't get his own way, a huge tantrum would ensue.

Nicholas' weight loss continued and he was now looking so thin and unhealthy that he looked like a prisoner of war. His energy levels were so low that he would be playing on the floor of our living room and tell me he was tired. I would tell him to go and have a rest but he didn't want to. By the time I turned around to do something, and looked back at him, he would be asleep on the floor mid play.

Our paediatrician decided to try a medication called Periactin, which was supposed to kick start Nicholas' appetite. Unfortunately it didn't seem to work. Our paediatrician then decided the behaviour might improve with a change in diet. He started to tell us about the chemicals in food, both natural, and added. He had a basic knowledge of this but decided to refer us to a dietician.

The dietician that we saw also only had a basic knowledge of food chemicals. She did her best but really couldn't answer any of my questions and was of no real help except for one very important piece of information. She wrote down the name of a local lady by the name of Sue Dengate, whom she said had a support group for people like us, and knew a lot about diet. She did not have a contact phone number or any other details. She also recommended that I buy the book Friendly Food that was recommended by RPAH. The book was about avoiding allergies, additives and problem food chemicals.

I went straight from the dietician's rooms to our local bookshop where I purchased the Friendly Food Cook Book. The woman who ran the bookshop asked me if I'd read the book Fed Up by Sue Dengate. I hadn't, and the store was out of stock. This prompted me to try to find Sue's phone number in the local phone book. Prior to contacting Sue, I phoned my mum in Brisbane to ask her to try to get hold of the book and send it to me.

I eventually got my copy of Fed Up and was shocked at what I read by both the natural and the added food chemicals. Nicholas was much worse in Darwin than he was in Wagga Wagga and our paediatrician said that it could be as simple as changing our bread. He said that in Darwin, because of the humidity, the breads had a lot more preservative in them than the breads down south. In the tropics the bread goes mouldy much quicker. I began reading food labels for the first time in my life and discovered that our bread which we all ate at least once a day, had preservative in it. This was only the beginning. After making contact with Sue I began to realise how fortunate I was to have her, especially living in our local area, because she has saved our lives on numerous occasions over the years.

The biggest hurdle for me in coming to terms with the failsafe diet was that I had to completely change my way of thinking when it came to foods. I had been raised on a diet of fresh fruit and vegetables and this was how we were raising our children. The obvious additives and preservatives were things that I could comprehend very easily as being "nasty" and I was more than happy to eliminate things like red cordial and "junk" food, although we really didn't eat a great deal of junk food.

The most difficult thing for me then, and even now, was coming to terms with the natural food chemicals that seemed to be in just about every fresh fruit and vegetable imaginable. In our early days of the failsafe diet, I went through a very real period of mourning. I mourned the fact that my son could no longer eat many of the fresh fruits and vegetables that most people ate and took for granted in their daily lives. I also mourned the fact that I had to take away many of the things which he truly loved, such as bananas, cheese, burritos, and much more. I was concerned about his nutrition because this new way of eating did not leave him with very much, and his weight from the age of three had always been a concern to us.

I quickly discovered the importance of reading the labels on everything I bought at the supermarket. It is something that you have to be totally diligent about because what is considered "safe" one week could be considered "unsafe" the very next week. A simple thing like a change in the ingredients can make a huge difference between a "safe" product and an "unsafe" product. One mistake could be the difference between whether the diet was successful or not.

In the beginning we made many mistakes but with trial and error, and the guidance of Sue, we managed to make our way through this dietary minefield and come to some semblance of what could be called our new normality. A diet with very limited fresh fruit and vegetables in comparison with our past life of a diet, which consisted of no limits at all, when it came to "healthy" foods and fresh fruits and vegetables.

We implemented the failsafe diet (the elimination diet recommended by RPAH), and with Sue's guidance we managed to avoid a lot of the common mistakes and pitfalls. It is not an easy diet to do as a beginner and so to have her help in this was invaluable. Initially, the whole family went failsafe in order to support Nicholas. We remained failsafe for quite a long time but eventually we all went back to our normal diet, except of course for Nicholas.

We still don't eat chocolate or any of the stuff he really loves in front of him. We try to "escape" if we feel the urge to be a bit naughty as we are very aware of his feelings. Nicholas did show considerable improvement once we got past the dreadful withdrawal symptoms, however, the improvement although noticeable was not enough and so we continued in our search to get our lovely little boy back. The calm, gentle beautiful little boy that we once had and were not prepared to give up without a fight.

We noticed that Nicholas used to get particularly irritable just before meal times, so when Steve mentioned this to our paediatrician he told us to try an over the counter complex sugar called Poly-Joule. We left the surgery shaking our heads in exasperation and thinking "yeah right" that will work. We were extremely surprised to discover that it did in fact work and he was the best he'd been in a long time.

Nicholas had already been tested for diabetes because his paternal grandfather is an insulin dependant diabetic, and so are two of his cousins. The success of Poly-Joule prompted our paediatrician to put Nicholas in hospital for two days and a night for some specialised fasting tests. Bloods and urine were taken at specific intervals over a 24hr period of total fasting except for water. At about ¾ of the way through the testing Nicholas started to have a "hypo" which resulted in an immediate halt to the tests.

The official results of these tests were that Nicholas had a very rare form of Hypoglycaemia called Ketotic Hypoglycaemia. We were then advised by our paediatrician to give Nicholas regular doses of Poly-Joule so that his sugar levels remained stable instead of up and down like a roller coaster. We then decided that the Ketotic Hypoglycaemia was the main cause of these dramatic mood swings and behaviours.

We continued with the failsafe diet as well as the Poly-Joule and again we saw some improvement, but once again it was not enough. The disgusting behaviours continued and I again contacted Sue in desperation. She suggested we implement 1,2,3 magic and very generously loaned us the video. We were very impressed with this simple technique so we decided to try it. The implementation of this behavioural technique saved our lives, and to this day, continues to play an important role in our lives. Once again, over time, we saw some improvement, and once again it still wasn't enough.

We again went back to our paediatrician who decided to put Nicholas on a one- week trial of Ritalin. By this stage we were desperate people and willing to try just about anything. At the end of the week we again contacted our Paediatrician and told him that it really didn't seem to have any effect on the behaviours. We now know that medication, like diet, requires fine-tuning, and adjustment to be effective. It was unfortunate that the paediatrician did not mention this to us at the time. We were, at this stage of our journey, very much in a period of trial and error.

He referred us to a visiting psychologist who said he'd like to hypnotise Nicholas and put Steve and I on medication. I decided this was somewhat extreme to say the least and informed our paediatrician that I would not be going back.

We resigned ourselves to the fact that this was pretty much as good as we could get, although things were still not good, and that is putting it mildly. The bed-wetting continued and so we were referred to a visiting neurologist who asked us to measure the capacity of Nicholas' urine output. We did this and were told that he definitely should have the capacity to be able to store his urine overnight. He also recommended the bell, pad and alarm system to try and rectify the problem.

Our paediatrician decided that Nicholas was too young for the bell, pad and alarm system, so he prescribed Minirin, a nasal spray medication that is designed to stop bedwetting. We were told to give him half the minimal dose for his age and weight and after only three doses Nicholas was rushed from school to hospital in an ambulance because he was having a seizure. Blood tests taken at the time showed low sodium but nothing more. Seizures were one of the known side effects of this drug but it was extremely rare. Nicholas was one of the rare ones.

During these years Nicholas' behaviour remained disgusting and it continued to be that way, but only at home. He never showed any of the violence at school, and never at the paediatrician, or our local GP. I would tell the doctors and teachers about his behaviour at home, and they would look at me as if I was some kind of neurotic woman. I began to feel as though I was from another planet. I also began to doubt my skills as a parent.

Relationships in our house were strained to say the least. There were times when Steve felt like leaving, and there were times when I felt the same way. Fortunately, we never both felt this way at the same time. I had many desperate teary phone calls to Sue during this time and several similar desperate calls to our paediatrician. I enquired about respite care because I felt I desperately needed a break. As a Defence Force family we were completely on our own with no extended family for support.

Relationships between Nicholas and our two teenagers were also strained. My eldest daughter wanted to leave home because things were so bad and so desperate, and she'd had about as much as she could handle. My eldest son just couldn't stand Nicholas and every time he was near him he would pinch, prod, poke, or annoy him in some way. I would never catch him doing it but I would always catch Nicholas retaliating and that would result in immediate time out for Nicholas.

In those days Nicholas had such dreadful behaviour that I made the mistake of blaming him whether it was his fault or not. It took me a number of years to catch on to what big brother was doing. I remember one occasion where things got so desperate that I went back to our GP and asked him what we should do. We had been going to our aediatrician for over two years and still did not have the result we desperately needed.

Our GP gave me this piece of very important advice. He said, "love this child, he is not doing this on purpose, no child ever wants to be like this". I have remembered this piece of advice and over the years it has helped to keep me going. I kept telling myself when things got rough that it was not deliberate, but that these behaviours were uncontrollable.

Time out and behaviour management strategies were effective up to a point, but Nicholas would never go to his room voluntarily. He always had to be carried there, kicking and screaming. I lost count of how many times he broke my watchband in the ensuing struggle to get him up two flights of stairs to his room. The older he got, the bigger and stronger he became, which made him much more difficult for me to deal with. He was super strong when he was in full tantrum mode and I started to have real concerns about how I would manage him, as he got older.

The years of difficulty and stress really took a toll on us as a family. My enquiries into respite care led to a dead end because there was none available to us in Darwin at that time. I had reached desperation and was seriously considering fostering Nicholas out because I was reaching the point where I was afraid that I might lose control one day and hurt him. At that stage the only thing that stopped me was my love for my son, and the determination I had to keep going, and to keep trying, and my unwillingness to give up. I felt that if his own mother couldn't deal with him, then who could?

I used to suffer badly from hormonal, monthly mood swings with every menstrual cycle so I made the decision to have a hysterectomy. I felt that if I was in one of my "moods" at the same time Nicholas was having one of his violent tantrums, that this was a combination, which was destined to end in disaster.

My GP was supportive of my decision because I'd had four children, two girls and two boys, I had just turned forty, and I definitely did not want any more children. My hysterectomy was never considered to be a drastic measure on my part; it was simply necessary for me to survive. It was, for me, the best thing I could have done, and I have no regrets about that what so ever.

Nicholas in the preschool year was never disruptive or badly behaved in that environment. He did not join in very much with the other children, particularly in singing or dancing, or anything where he had to really let himself go and have fun. He was always very stiff and controlled. I remember seeing his teacher once grab both his hands and physically move his arms to do the actions for a song they were singing up on stage. He hated it. He showed very little in the way of emotions, he very rarely smiled, and was very rarely spontaneous with anything, both in conversation, and in the form of gestures. He had a marked delay in his speech and I was forever explaining to people that if he did not answer a question straight away, he was not being rude; it simply took a while for him to process his thoughts.

In his first year at school he was fortunate to have a teacher who was very supportive and who also had a son with ADD. She asked me if Nicholas had ADD and I said no, our paediatrician had never even mentioned this as a possibility. Nicholas has always been an excellent reader, and very good at maths. His writing however, was very poor. It was very difficult to read and I was worried at one stage that he might have been dyslexic. He wrote a lot of his letters and numerals backwards or like the mirror image. He never completed any of his written work. In the first year of school this was not too much of a concern, and on his report it was written that he is a good, well-behaved little boy who daydreams. His teacher suspected processing problems of some sort and so it was recommended that we take him for hearing and eye tests, both of which came back saying that everything was fine.

In his second year of school his teacher had trouble getting him to stay on task. She tried keeping him in at lunchtime; but he didn’t seem to care, and still did not complete his work. I mentioned his inability to stay on task and complete his work to our paediatrician. He was not overly concerned because Nicholas was so good at reading and maths. Nicholas became very clever at covering up his weaknesses.

At the end of his second year of school, our third year in Darwin, we were offered a posting to Sydney. We thought long and hard about accepting this posting because our eldest daughter had just completed year eleven, which would make this move a particularly difficult one for her. In the end we decided to accept the posting because we felt that in Sydney we would have access to a greater number of experienced professionals. We pretty much thought that if we had no luck in Sydney with Nicholas then this was perhaps as good as it was ever going to be.

We were referred to a very experienced paediatrician in Sydney who listened to what we had to say and gave us two questionnaires to be filled out and returned. One was a parent questionnaire, and the other was a teacher questionnaire. The result of these questionnaires was that Nicholas had, in her opinion, ADHD. Our paediatrician felt that Nicholas was not bad enough to require medication even although the disgusting behaviours continued.

Once again, I had to explain to yet another paediatrician that these behaviours were only ever exclusive to us at home. I began to get the feeling that we were being perceived as having some sort of bad home life that was causing these behaviours. My gut feeling was and still is, that two things caused these behaviours. One was diet related, and the other was frustration from learning difficulties at school. I learned very early that if I allowed Nicholas to digress from the failsafe diet that we were in for a very rough ride, always with violent behaviour. School was something that I was unsure about until we started to have huge battles over homework.

A month after arriving in Sydney, Nicholas' behaviour became worse. We put this down to the fact that we had just moved, he was missing his friends from Darwin, and all the stresses and strains associated with changing schools etc. We felt sure that with the passage of time things would improve. They did not. He started punching, head butting, kicking and screaming. When he was sent to time out he kicked a hole in the wall. This became a common occurrence.

After one such session I phoned our paediatrician in tears and said that I couldn't do this for much longer. I tried increasing the Poly-Joule and this seemed to have no effect. Our paediatrician decided to admit Nicholas to hospital and re do the testing for hypoglycaemia. The result of this was that Nicholas had now outgrown the hypoglycaemia, which we were originally told he would outgrow at around the age of nine. The decision was made to stop giving him the Poly-Joule.

We were then referred to the enuresis clinic at Westmead Children's Hospital to try and address the bedwetting. Nicholas was 7½ by this stage. The specialist that we saw recommended the bell, pad and alarm system. We had great success with this method and within three nights Nicholas was dry for the first time in his life. He has never wet the bed since.

Prior to leaving Darwin, Nicholas' eyes became very sensitive to all kinds of light from different sources including, sunlight, and computer screens. He had a CT scan to rule out any nasties. In Sydney he was referred to the eye clinic at Westmead Children's Hospital where we were prescribed two different types of eye drops for viral conjunctivitis. The eye specialist was very good and when I explained Nicholas' sensitivity to foods he prescribed preservative free eye drops. The viral conjunctivitis was cured, however the light sensitivity remains.

Our paediatrician told me that she believed only 4% of children were affected by food intolerances and so I began to educate her on this matter. At every visit I would tell her "we had pizza the other night, I let Nicholas off his diet and he went totally off the planet". Another time we had Chinese take away as a treat for Elise's birthday, (something we hadn't had for years), I let Nicholas off his diet and within minutes of eating it he had thrown a major tantrum and broke one of our kitchen chairs. After two weeks of swimming at school, on a Saturday at home, he was told "no" to something and he broke a solid wooden door on our entertainment unit.

Our paediatrician always listened to me but I always felt that I was still being perceived as some kind of neurotic woman who was speaking a strange language that no one else could understand. I phoned her one day in tears after one of these episodes and said that I was afraid that I might hurt him if things didn't improve. She told me she could arrange for respite care if I needed it. After that phone call, at every visit, Nicholas was asked to take off all his clothes with the exception of his underpants. He was checked thoroughly from top to toe. I know that these children are considered "at risk of abuse" and I realise how close I have come to hurting this child on a number of occasions, but I have to say that this was one of the most humiliating experiences I've ever had to deal with.

At this point, I started asking questions like "who protects the parents?" It seemed that it was okay for Nicholas to kick, punch and head butt me, but it was not okay if I lost my temper one day and hurt him.

I remember sending him to time out on one occasion and I was bending down holding one leg to remove his shoes. He swung around with the other leg and kicked my nose. On another occasion he threatened to break my glasses. Another time, he told me he was going to break my arm and he kicked me so hard in the forearm that I actually thought he did. I went to our local GP who said that it wasn't broken but that the deep muscle tissue was badly bruised.

There are other instances where he has kicked and bruised my legs, and these have been recorded on my medical documents. These dramatic violent outbursts were always followed by periods of remorse where Nicholas would come to me crying and feeling bad about whatever it was that he had done. I always took full advantage of these times and we would sit down on the couch and have a cuddle and talk about it. These times actually reinforced to him, that we did still love him very much, and they reinforced to us that he truly didn't want to be the way he was. Nicholas behaviour continued its decline. Who would have thought that this was possible? He spent a lot of time in his room in time out. He would throw a tantrum for no apparent reason. He would kick, punch, and head butt. All it would take was for us to look at him in the wrong way, whatever the wrong way was, or to tell him "no". It got to the point where every time he was sent to time out, he had to be physically restrained otherwise there would be another hole kicked in the wall.

Often it would take 20 to 30 minutes for him to calm down. At times I would have to lie on top of him on the floor to restrain his arms and legs. He was always very strong during these episodes and he could easily lift me off the floor with his legs. If I let go to steady myself then he would be free to kick, punch and head butt.

Our paediatrician referred us to the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at Westmead Children's Hospital. We were concerned whether Nicholas' very limited diet was adequate on a long-term basis given that he had now been failsafe for four years.

We had to measure, weigh and record everything he ate and drank over a three-day period. This included his medication and brand names of the food that he was fed. This information was entered into a computer and analysed, the end result being that with a few minor modifications his diet was not ideal, but adequate.

Moving to Sydney brought with it some complications that we weren't expecting. Brumby's bread, which we took for granted in Darwin was no longer easily accessible. Our failsafe sausages were hard to come by. I bought a bread maker but Nicholas did not like the bread we made. I found commercially available failsafe bread but Nicholas did not like that either.

I decided to let him try Helga's bread because he liked it, and remembering that our paediatrician believed only 4% of children were food intolerant, I thought I'd give it a go. Nicholas' behaviour got worse over a period of time so we made the decision to get the bread that we knew was safe and that we knew he liked. We decided to make the effort and do the one hour drive to the closest Brumby's bread shop.

He started to eat his school lunch again. Prior to this he was throwing it in the bin. We knew this because we happened to be at school one day and actually caught him doing it. Sausages were another problem. I had asked my local butcher to make up a special batch to a recipe out of Fed Up. He assured me there were no preservatives or additives in them. I was not totally convinced about this, so we again made the decision to travel to a butcher that we know we can trust. Unfortunately this was in the opposite direction to Brumby's.

Our paediatrician decided to refer us to a psychologist for a behavioural assessment with a view to using medication. The referral stated that in her opinion the mother was maternally depressed. I was pretty annoyed about that to begin with but after some thought I decided she was right. Who wouldn't be? Given the number of years and the many stresses we endured during this journey. At this stage she still felt that Nicholas wasn't bad enough to need medication.

We had the assessment and the psychologist initially thought that he had Aspergers Syndrome. She did a questionnaire with us and decided that he did not meet the criteria. However she did recommend medication, even if only as a temporary basis, to help restore very fragile family relationships. An anti depressant was also recommended and because of Nicholas' delayed speech she asked that we see a speech pathologist. Our paediatrician decided against an anti depressant for Nicholas but agreed to try him on Dexamphetamine. Nicholas started taking Dexamphetamine in July 2001.

Nicholas did not do well on Dexamphetamine. He became very teary and emotional, more so than usual. He lost weight more rapidly, which was not good as he was under weight to begin with. He also had a lot of trouble getting to sleep at night; often he would get out of bed and play with toys late at night, in the dark, before falling asleep out of sheer exhaustion.

We persevered with Dexamphetamine for a while because we wanted to give it a fair go and also because we noticed that Nicholas' written work had improved dramatically with his homework. Prior to medication homework was like a battleground. He would sit for hours and write three words, some days he would write nothing at all. He would now complete all of his homework and sometimes even illustrate his stories.

In the end, the weight loss, lack of sleep and the emotional ups and downs just weren't worth it so we asked our paediatrician if we could try him on Ritalin. I had heard of some excellent results with Ritalin and I wanted to give it a try. Our paediatrician was somewhat reluctant to make the change because we were finally booked in, at my request, to the Immunology Department at Westmead Children's Hospital, to do the double blind capsule challenges. She did not want to make any unnecessary changes at this stage.

I had seen such an improvement in Nicholas' written work with the Dexamphetamine, and also glimpses of a lovely little boy, in between the nasty tantrums, that I decided to stand my ground on this issue. We started the Ritalin in November 2001 and after a couple of "settling in" weeks Nicholas started to improve out of sight. A month later at our next visit to our paediatrician, Nicholas' weight had remained the same. This was a good sign because it meant he had not lost any more weight. He had started to sleep much better at night and the emotional ups and downs that he experienced with the Dexamphetamine seemed much less once he started taking the Ritalin.

Our paediatrician recommended that Nicholas should only take Ritalin during the school week, never on weekends or during school holidays. This has proven to be very effective.

At the same time we were referred to a speech pathologist that also thought that Nicholas had Aspergers Syndrome. In September 2001 she did a language assessment that showed that Nicholas has high-level receptive and expressive language problems in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, auditory processing and verbal reasoning. He relies on visual information when listening to instructions, and finds listening alone, without pictures, more challenging. He has poor semantic organisation, including weak word finding skills. Verbal reasoning and critical thinking in the form of problem solving is also a major area of weakness.

The speech pathologist still felt that Aspergers Syndrome was a consideration and recommended that we see another psychologist, one who is very well known, and who specialises in the Autism Spectrum Disorders.

We saw this psychologist who also thought that Aspergers played a part in all of this. He did the Aspergers questionnaire with us and decided that Nicholas did not meet the Aspergers criteria. However, he phoned me a couple of hours later and said he'd had a rethink after reviewing the results. He now felt that Nicholas did have features of Aspergers Disorder. Nicholas has now been diagnosed as having a variety of developmental disorders. These include ADHD, high-level language impairment, and features of Aspergers' Disorder.

We implemented some anger management strategies, and learned other ways of saying "no". We re-trained ourselves to say, "not right now, maybe later" instead of using "no" as an answer; this strategy is simple but very effective. Other strategies included the use of social stories. These are stories that Nicholas wrote with the help of the psychologist about what he can do when he feels angry. We also used many types of small rewards to reinforce good behaviour.

Our psychologist report stated that Nicholas required Integration Support in the classroom to assist attention, on task behaviour, to adapt tasks, and to specifically implement social, communication, and empathy programs. This report assisted the school in obtaining Government funding to provide some extra assistance for Nicholas in the classroom.

We have been very fortunate to have a school that is supportive of special needs children. They have placed Nicholas in a class with a girl in a wheelchair who has an aide on a full time basis. When the aide is not required to assist the girl, she is free to give Nicholas whatever assistance he needs. He has an integration teacher who assists him for one hour each week, one on one, and he also has access to other integration teachers on an as needs basis. He has visits at least once a term at school, from both his psychologist and speech pathologist, who will jointly monitor his progress over the coming years.

The double blind dietary capsule challenges were only ever done on weekends and during the Christmas school holidays. Remembering that Nicholas only takes Ritalin on school days to enable him to stay on task and complete his schoolwork. This enabled us to get a very clear result and record only the food related behaviours. It also enabled us to record the behaviours accurately without any other outside influences.

We began the double blind dietary capsule challenges at the beginning of December and they were completed at the end of February. The results were as I'd suspected. No great surprises. He is highly sensitive to MSG, calcium propionate, sodium benzoate, sodium metabisulphite, salicylates, antioxidants and food colourings tartrazine, sunset yellow, erythrosine and azorubine. It was a huge relief for us to finally have an official, clinical diagnosis from the immunologist. These results confirmed my suspicions in relation to food related behaviours.

Most challenges that he reacted to were with violent reactions such as kicking, punching, head butting, throwing things or ripping posters off the wall in his room. There were a couple of challenges where he reacted with babbling and increased hyperactivity.

It took me five years to find the courage to do these challenges and when we were almost finished them, Nicholas came to me, and said that he didn't want to do any more because he didn't want to be naughty. He realises that some foods exacerbate his oppositional behaviour. He also realises that some foods make him unwell.

We occasionally have burritos for dinner, which is one of his favourite foods. On these rare occasions I let him off the diet. He always has at least three or four, plain, with no filling, exceptfor maybe a small amount of grated cheese. At bedtime when we are tucking him in and saying "goodnight" he often tells us that he "doesn't feel well". In addition to this, and because of the additives and preservatives in the burritos, he becomes noticeably hyperactive.

Since Christmas 2001, Nicholas has undergone a complete transformation. Time outs are no longer a big part of his life. The delay in his speech is all but gone. He smiles, laughs and does things spontaneously, something he seldom did before. He comes home from school, takes his afternoon medication and sits straight down to do his homework with no prompting from me and no arguing from him. Homework is no longer the battleground that it once was. He completes all his written homework and pretty much all of his written work in class.

He is developing a wonderful sense of humour and is an absolute delight to be with. So far this year, he has earned three merit certificates at school. He was voted as a school representative council member for his class. He received a special smiley pencil award for sitting up straight and behaving beautifully during assembly. He was also Super Kid for the month of April, which earned him a Super Kid badge that entitles him to politely go to the front of the queue at the canteen. Unfortunately this was not very useful for him because he couldn't really buy much that is failsafe, however, it was great for his self-esteem and he was very proud of this achievement. He also got to have morning tea with the Principal. He was let off his diet for that special occasion and when he got home, I asked him what he ate. He said, "I can't remember, but it was fun".

I cannot put my finger on any one thing that we have done differently, for these wonderful changes that have taken place. After five years of the failsafe diet, almost five years of behaviour management in the form of 1,2,3 Magic, the final piece to our puzzle has been medication, in the form of Ritalin. It is my firm belief that no parent ever wants to medicate their child, especially one so young. We had spent the past five years exploring and implementing diet and behaviour management. During these years we saw some improvement but not enough for us to survive. Medication was our last option. In our case, we needed the multi-modal approach, and no one thing would work without the other. The combination of diet, behaviour management and medication was, and still is, the key to our success. Diet for us was not enough, however, I believe that without implementing the failsafe diet all those years ago, Nicholas would have needed a much higher dose of medication. I also believe that his developmental disorders, ADHD, high-level language impairment and features of Asperges Disorder would have been much greater. His behaviour was often so violent that I was convinced he would one day be in a juvenile prison, or worse.

In conclusion, all of Nicholas' violent behaviours and reactions were in my opinion, caused by two things, food intolerances and the frustrations associated with learning difficulties. The food intolerances are controlled with diet. Without diet, the violent behaviours return. Medication helps Nicholas to stay on task, which enables him to complete his schoolwork and homework. This helps to overcome the frustration associated with learning difficulties.

Regardless of whether or not Nicholas is taking medication, we know that if we allow him to break his diet, and we sometimes do on special occasions, we can expect a return of the violent behaviours. On these occasions behaviour management is still required.

We still have a long way to go in terms of monitoring Nicholas' education and assisting him with overcoming these learning difficulties. We are fully aware that there will be some rough patches as our son navigates his own path in life, but for now, the most important thing for us as a family, is to finally have our loving, gentle, caring, beautiful little boy back with us again. He is a pleasure to be with, and a son to be truly proud of. Relationships during these past four months have started to heal and we have finally found the light at the end of a very long tunnel, something that for many years we thought we were never going to find.

I would like to thank the following people for their support and the individual roles they played in helping us to achieve our happy ending.

Paediatrician: Dr Ross Diplock – for his advice in trying diet before medication.

Author: Sue Dengate – for her continued support with helping us to navigate the dietary minefields, and for keeping us on track with her unfailing belief of foods and the way in which they affect behaviour.

Paediatrician: Dr Patricia McVeagh – for assisting us in the final stages of our journey, and the implementation of controlled medication.

Consultant Psychologist: Lizette Campbell – for her recommendations for speech therapy and medication.

Speech Pathologist: Philippa Greathead – for her continued support, her referral to psychologist Anthony Warren, and for her language assessment, which really brought home to us the many learning difficulties that Nicholas was experiencing.

Psychologist: Anthony Warren - for his continued support and for his report that was integral to obtaining Government funding for extra assistance in the classroom.

The Failsafe Discussion Group: This group of people primarily discuss the failsafe diet, but also discuss many other challenges faced by special needs families. Their wealth of information and support knows no bounds. I would not have survived these "challenging" years without these people. I have learned so much from this group and we are all still learning. Together, we can all make a difference, and we can all find that light at the end of the tunnel.

- Susan, June 2002

[100] Ginny's story 26 years on, the full story (August 2001)

Birth - Chris is born nearly 2 months early. We stay in hospital until Chris is a month old. Staff regularly comment on the huge amount of crying he does and his restlessness. They put this down to a consequence of being prem and assure me he will be more normal and settled by the time he was due to be born.

2 mths - Chris doesn't settle - he gets worse, screaming and crying all the time all day and night. Regularly passes out from lack of oxygen. We try every colic remedy available - nothing helps. I even try giving him a range of formulas on the doctor's advice - none of these make any difference so after a few day on each I go back to breastfeeding.

2 1/2 mths - we notice Chris has a serious hernia and needs an emergency operation - his stomach is split right across and the muscles are trapping the arteries going to the testes - we hope no permanent damage is done - staff and doctors tell me it was probably caused as a result of the bad colic he has and him pushing in pain all the time. They assure me he will be a lot better when his stomach heals and should settle down - a bit of a contradiction but I go home and hope.

3 1/2 mths - I am totally exhausted and can not cope at all anymore - sick of the lack of support and everybody telling me that babies cry and I should just get over it. They all think I am a hypochondriac. I start colouring behaviour charts showing his screaming/crying/grizzling and sleep. I now know I am not exaggerating or pulling things out of proportion - the charts show he is worse than I thought. He is crying and screaming for about 18 hours out of 24. When he does sleep out of exhaustion it will be for one or two hours only - generally throughout the night. He rarely sleeps during daylight hours.

I ring my doctor in desperation. I am afraid I might hurt Chris if I don't get some sleep soon and get him sorted out. My doctor admits us to hospital. The staff take over Chris and I get to sleep. Staff are amazed at the amount Chris screams - at first they think it is just because he is away from me and home but I assure them he is the same at home. His crying continues non stop even after being in hospital over a week and in my arms a lot of the time. The doctor suggests we try the elimination diet. We see our local dietitian. I start the diet. The dietitian suggests we don't give Chris any solids for a while. I read somewhere that he shouldn't get them until he is about 7 to 8 months old.

4 1/2 mths Chris is getting a lot better. He isn't screaming near as much though is still crying a fair bit. We really notice it when I eat anything on the no go list - we have to cope with his screaming within 24 hours. Chris's diarrhea is nowhere near as constant. He is now sleeping for 4 to 5 hour blocks at night and settling quickly after a feed and change. His body language now shows more tiredness rather than pain symptoms when he is upset. His reflux has disappeared.

5 1/2 mths My behaviour charts show that Chris is improving a lot. He is now crying more than screaming. He is slowly getting over all withdrawal symptoms of the many chemicals in the foods that I was eating that were affecting him. I still can't get him to sleep during the day. (The diet is not as effective as it should be because I am making salicylate mistakes like drinking way too much lemonade and eating lots of carrots and pumpkin - but I don't find that out for another 10 months.)

7 1/2 mths We start using management strategies to try to get Chris to sleep during the day. Our doctor thinks he can't sleep as he doesn't know how and is not in the habit. We succeed after a week and now Chris is sleeping for 2 hours in the morning and afternoon. We also introduce some solid foods. Chris's crying and grizzling improves hugely. He is now actually appearing to be really happy sometimes.

12 mths Chris weans himself and has been on Neocate ever since - other formulas such as soy cause instant unpleasant reactions - back to no sleep and crying a lot.

14 mths Chris goes off all carrots and pumpkin - makes it really hard for me to find foods to get him to eat as he eats a huge amount of each of these. We notice a big change in Chris - he stops grizzling altogether and is suddenly really easy to manage. He is a lot more agreeable!! Have a look through my books and discover that pumpkin and carrot are moderate in salicylates - I thought they were low!! No wonder he wasn't 100%. He was obviously getting too many salicylates!

19 mths Chris is now fantastic. We are really enjoying him. He reacts to all the things avoided on the elimination diet still so it is not much fun when we try challenges. We really pay for it - he reacts differently with different chemicals. Salicylates, preservatives and amines make him scream in pain and he gets diarrhea. Preservative 282 in bread is by far the worst - within 3 hours Chris is screaming in agony and has chronic diarrhea. When I was breastfeeding and ate 282 he would react within 12 hours. Colours make him really hyperactive, uncontrollable and he ends up getting hurt. - Dani, WA

[083] Some children need to avoid milk as well (October 2000)

"Three weeks ago I totally spat it with my son as he would only drink milk out of a bottle. So I got tough and threw them away. He won't drink milk now unless he has a bottle - which he doesn't get. After a few miserable days (even though he still asks for a bottle of milk) he has given up milk altogether. He has become a totally different child - a lot more placid, tantrums are very few and far between (from 4 a day to maybe one a week), easily to reason with, a lot more tolerant of waiting for things, less oppositional and a lot more happy (Mum is too). I am not the only one who has noticed as my husband, Mum, Mother-in-law, friends etc have all commented too." - reader, Victoria

[049] "I would once have thought that this was coincidence" - 8 year-old boy with ODD (June 2000)

I have just read your book "Fed Up" and it makes a lot of sense. My husband and I have an 8 year old boy and 6 year old daughter. After reading the book, we realise that our son has oppositional defiance. I spoke to his teacher yesterday. She could not understand that he would behave in any sort of aggressive way or be so defiant at home. She said that he only needs to be told once to do something, never has any problems in class or at school ... We took the family to a child psychiatry service because we were so concerned about our son's behaviour and not being able to discipline him, and also because he has many irrational fears. We had help to get him used to new situations and heights but on a number of occasions were told that his behaviour (when seen by the staff) was "normal sibling rivalry" and by adjusting our ways of dealing with situations we could help change the behaviour. It did help a little. Two weeks ago I decided that we would cut out additives. The Sunday night before I gave the children the remaining packets of Twisties ... of course our son was ballistic within a short period of time. (We never have cordial or fizzy drinks in the house and rarely consume icecream or desserts at home). We had a good week, with no incidents worth mentioning. I did not have to ask him to settle down while he was at swimming lessons! On Sunday I was planning to implement the diet the next day so let the children have a sausage with tomato sauce and bought bread (I have been making my own for a number of years now); also had a small piece of iced sponge cake and a small amount of trifle. Our son went ballistic again and was told to go to room and calm down. He was "escorted" to his room, uncooperative, yelling abuse, head butting, punching, screaming, banging walls – uncontrollable. Next morning he was up bright and early and happy as a bird. In fact in the last nearly two weeks he has been up before my husband leaves for work at 7.00 am whereas before I had to wake him at 7.30 am. He is now getting ready quickly and is very happy – he used to be such a grump that you couldn't look sideways at him. And this is not quite two weeks! However, last night I cooked a casserole and did all the wrong things. I added tomato paste and soy sauce. The children also had orange juice. This morning our son had his breakfast OK but from then on dawdled and fidgeted and played and was only just ready, with my help, in time to leave for the bus. He was surly and sulky at the bus stop and would not join us but kept kicking a signpost. I would once have thought that this was coincidence but after reading your book cannot think that it is anything but food related. Thank you for showing us that there are ways to help our children. We will give it a proper trial. Thank you once again for showing us a light! - reader, NSW

[049] "I would once have thought that this was coincidence" - 8 year-old boy with ODD (June 2000)

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[044] "I was sceptical" (May 2000)

I have just started my daughter (4) on the FAILSAFE diet. I didn't really expect to see any change in her behaviour, I was a bit sceptical but I thought it was worth a try. She has been on it for three weeks now. She used to drink up to 15 litres of apple juice cordial a week. She does not have ADD, from my observation, but I think she may come into a category of ODD and a bit hyperactive. We have seen much improvement in both areas ... I have also noticed that I am less tired on the diet. I love my daughter but she has always been difficult to stand up to and her behaviour pushes me away. I have found that we are now getting on better and I feel closer to her as she is not yelling at me and opposing me all the time. I kept waiting for the day when she would grow out of her stages of behaviour, but I think I have finally found the answer. ... Thanks for a terrific book . I have bought it for a couple of my friends I was so impressed with the results - Nurse, by email

[039] "They said we would be wasting our time" using diet for ADHD and ODD (May 2000)

My eight year old son was recently diagnosed ADHD and ODD by three different doctors. All three doctors said we would be wasting our time altering his diet and that the only thing to do was to prescribe drugs.

We didn't want to put him on drugs but my wife and I were at our wits end, our son was becoming more and more of a handful, I must admit I was about to give up and take the doctors' advice.

We bought your book "Fed Up" and started the diet. My God, the improvement was almost instant. He changed from an aggressive and argumentative little creep to a loving and caring little boy almost immediately. My wife, myself, our other two children and most of all our son's teacher are amazed. We have stuck to the diet and there have been no hassles in the home or the classroom for several weeks. Although last weekend we took the kids out for the day and bought them each a bottle of Schweppes lemonade. Within half an hour our son was back to his aggressive old self ... learned a lesson there. He now realises that some things make him cranky and steers away from them, after all, he says he doesn't like being his angry self.

Sue, we don't know how to thank you. You have changed the lives of not only our family, but the other kids in our son's classroom, who I'm sure are as grateful as we are. - concerned father, ACT