**Autism and Tactile ‘White Noise.’ Uncomfortable Feelings?**

April 24, 2015 by [Stella Waterhouse](http://www.autismdailynewscast.com/author/stellawaterhouse/)

Does your child scratch himself frantically at times? Or suddenly seem to get the shivers? Or perhaps have an unexpected outburst of hitting or slapping himself?

In *The Ultimate Stranger* in the 1970s the late Dr Delacato described tactile ‘white noise.’ These were children whose skin itched for no apparent reason or suddenly had an attack of the shivers. Children whose skin would ripple and move with even the hairs on their arms standing up for a few moments before settling down again. Children who were prone to have periods of calm but would then suddenly hit themselves almost as if there had been a ‘buildup’ of sensation within their bodies that they felt ‘impelled’ to release.

Today we also know, firsthand, that such sensations are individual, affecting various parts of the body in different ways and that they can be extremely painful. Thus in her book *A Real Person* Gunilla Gerland tells us that she experienced a strange and highly unpleasant feeling – like cold steel – in her spine when growing up. This caused an almost constant shudder that got much worse periodically – at which point it became a constant torture. Carly Fleischmann too has equally strange physical sensations although in her case they made her legs feel as if they were on fire and a million ants were crawling up her arms.

So what could possibly cause such problems? In many cases such things are related to Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) but other factors have been implicated too – especially in relation to itching. These include:

* Stress.
* Elevated histamine levels.
* Possible food allergies/intolerances.
* Possible allergies to soap products/shampoo etc.
* Side effects of some medications.

So how can they be alleviated so that the child does not scratch or hit himself until he bleeds, or continue doing such things until the behavior becomes habitual?

One of the most important factors with children is to find some way in which they can communicate so that they will be able to tell you how they feel and also share the things that help them feel better.  There are a wide range of ways in which this can be done if the child is non-verbal from augmented communication to speech apps – a subject I’ll return to later in this series.

Meanwhile the most helpful tips I have found so far for alleviating the problems (taken from a variety of sources) include:

*Top tips*

* Keep a diary in which you can note the times/days the child seems most affected.
* If SPD is part of the problem an Occupational Therapist may be able to offer advice on the best ways to help the child. This could include.

Massage – it can relieve stress as well.

* Rubbing or ‘brushing’ his arms with a soft brush.
* Drink plenty of liquids and eat a healthy diet.

If you have concerns about his diet get professional advice to see if he would benefit from removing food such as gluten and milk or food dyes/preservatives. NB If you stop milk do try to avoid substituting it with soy as many people are allergic to that too.

* Stress is a constant for children with ASD and can deplete his body of some nutrients so supplements may be needed too – but do take advice first.

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Unfortunately scratching an itch causes the brain to release a chemical called serotonin to help control the pain – which tends to make the itching more intense. Research into itching is ongoing but meanwhile other products which seem to have helped some children include:

* Non-allergenic soaps/shampoos and non-bio washing powders.
* A humidifier in the home can help alleviate dry skin.as can hypoallergenic moisturizing face and body lotions
* Lauricidin® a non-toxic product derived from coconut oil.
* Honey and Vitamin C.
* Quercetin – a plant pigment.
* Topical lotions – like Calamine, Sarna and Gold Bond lotion.
* Antihistamine medications like Benadryl, Claritin etc but it is wise to check with your doctor or pharmacist first if using these.