**Autism and ‘Hypersmell’ – Can You Smell That?**

May 1, 2015 by [Stella Waterhouse](http://www.autismdailynewscast.com/author/stellawaterhouse/)

Did your child fight at the breast? Does he get upset or retreat when some people approach him – seemingly without reason? Or avoid certain places – even when they are quiet?

If so it is possible that he suffers from ‘nose pollution’ (an extreme hypersensitivity to odors) which he will be unable to block out.

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In the early days of life, the senses of smell, taste and touch are more highly developed than sight or hearing but as the child grows a change occurs and taste and smell are generally ‘relegated’ to a secondary role. But life is actually pervaded by odors and while most of us have no problem with that any child who is hypersensitive to smell is likely, as the late Dr Delacato wrote, to live ‘in a horrible world.’

Being ‘hyper’ to smell can have far-reaching effects. Most of us might find it unpleasant to holiday near a farm where the farmer had been muck-spreading, but after a short time we would ‘shut the smell out’ so that it no longer troubled us. Imagine though if that smell remained with you hour after hour after hour?

For hyper children things are much worse for it isn’t only strong smells that are problematic. Some of them are so sensitive that they smell things that most of us could not detect. To make matters worse many everyday products smell much stronger to them than they would to you or me – so that one man even hated to walk on the lawn because he found the smell of fresh grass intolerable.

That enhanced sense of smell is a gift to people who create perfumes (who are sometimes referred to as a ‘nose’) and certainly some smells may be pleasurable for the hyper child and yet at other times that hypersensitivity is also a curse.

Just imagine yourself as an infant, whose mother has just picked you up. You suddenly become aware of a variety of strong and overpowering smells; a confusion of perfume, hairspray, soap and even her breath (and her breakfast) as she talks to you: some of which are extremely unpleasant! You could make more sense of faces if the people came close, but then … the smell! Your father’s clothes smell of dogs and smoke and when he speaks smoke, coffee and toothpaste waft towards you and overwhelm you.

Hardly surprising then that some everyday smells lead such children to avoid the kitchen and even reject some foods because of the smell. Or that some children will do anything to avoid going to the toilet: a few being so sensitive that their own waste makes them gag or vomit. Or that such problems can severely limit social contact – as with the girl who ‘found’ that ‘9 out of 10 people have halitosis.’

Such things have been associated with ASD at least since the 1940s as we find in an account by a young man who was originally diagnosed by Kanner when he was 5. When he was 31 he described his childhood to the late Jules Bemporad, a psychiatrist. As Dr Bemporad recalled:

‘The recurrent theme that ran through all of Jerry’s recollections was of living in a frightening world presenting painful stimuli that could not be mastered. Noises were unbearably loud, smells over-powering.’

Today we also know that some people have specific smells that actually give them headaches, stomachache, nausea, or even trigger seizures: one person finding that a whole range of smells including paint, cigarettes, glue, alcohol and yeast triggered his seizures.

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***Top Tips***
\* Explain the problem to those people he has regular contact with.
\* Be aware of the products you use yourself.
\* Alter the environment to decrease his discomfort by:
–  Keeping household odors to a minimum and avoiding products that have strong odors wherever possible.
– Using good ventilation to eliminate strong odors.
– Using non-smelly soaps/deodorants/washing powders.
– Keep food bland and non-aromatic.
\* Get him used to tolerating smells but remember not to hold them too near him.
– begin with mild smells and then gradually extend the range