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Autism is a common neurodevelopmental condition. Up to 95% of autistic children have feeding problems. These feeding problems - typically eating only a very small range of foods - can result in poor diets that can persist into adulthood. These dietary issues contribute to the 16-year shortened average lifespan of autistic adults.

After I qualified as a dietitian I quickly moved into paediatrics. I found that in my community clinics there were large numbers of autistic children being referred for feeding problems but I was ill-equipped to help them. I decided to change this - I did a lot of reading, went on many courses, and joined then became chair of the British Dietetic Association autism specialist group. I am passionate about improving the care of autistic children and adults and improving the education of dietitians and other feeding professionals around autism. Research is a key way to have more impact in this often overlooked area.

In 2017 I completed an NIHR-sponsored MRes (MSc in Clinical Research) at Coventry University through which I received a really useful grounding in research methods and carried out a qualitative study - interviewing parents of autistic children about their feeding problems.

From 2020-2021 I had a place on the NIHR MRes to PhD bridging scheme - backfilling me for a day a week. Through this and through UHCW's research department I have had great support in developing a proposal for an ambitious PhD project to develop a complex intervention - a toolkit for first line help for parents of autistic children with feeding problems. I submitted the proposal to two different NIHR PhD studentships in 2021 and currently await the outcome.

