

# Reflections

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# Mercy Neurologist...

## Finding New Ways to Treat Autism

Your 18-month-old may be healthy and growing properly, but suddenly, for no apparent reason, your baby's personality may change drastically.

The baby may stop talking or communicating all together, lose interest in his or her toys or start doing unusual things with toys such as lining them up. This behavior change could signal the onset of autism, a severe neurological disease effecting language and social development where kids tend to be quite withdrawn and have a lot of disruptive behavior.

This past year, Mercy's neurologist Andy Plioplys, M.D., may have discovered a new way to treat autistic children using anticonvulsant medication.

Dr. Plioplys decided to perform electroencephalo-grams (EEG's) on three of his autistic patients. The EEG, which is not a standard test for autistic children, revealed that all three had abnormal electrical activity (sei-

zure activity) in the speech center of the brain.

"When we started anti-seizure medication, there was a tremendous improvement in all three," Plioplys said. "In the most dramatic case, within two months of starting treatment, the four-year-old started speaking in four and five word sentences, whereas before he did not speak at all."



Mercy Neurologist Dr. Plioplys.

These children's speech delay and autism were cured with anticonvulsants. After the treatment, none of them qualified as having autism according to the Diagnos-

tic and Statistical Manual - Third Version Revised, published by the American Psychiatric Association.

For a majority of the cases there is no explanation of what

causes autism. Some children are born with it, while others develop it. Symptoms can occur as early as six months or as late as four years. In most cases, there is little hope of recovery, with only about five percent of autistic children being able to lead normal, independent adult lives.

Board certified in neurology, Dr. Plioplys works in the Alzheimer's Disease Center at Mercy. He conducts research on the causes and treatments of Alzheimer's in addition to other neurological illnesses. For more information on Dr. Plioplys' studies, call the Alzheimer's Disease Center at (312) 567-7900.