

THE HEALING JOURNAL

CHAPTER ONE

AINA DAVIES

Tracking the real reasons behind
the ASD symptoms and diagnosis

Understanding the Root Causes Behind the Symptoms

You've probably come across this guide because your child has been diagnosed with autism or is showing signs of developmental delay.

For many of us, the first days or months after diagnosis are filled with emotions we never expected. Grief, guilt, anger, or even shame can quietly sit beneath the surface. If you feel powerless or overwhelmed, please know this doesn't make you a bad parent, it makes you human. Allowing yourself to grieve what you imagined, while holding onto hope for what is possible, is part of the journey. You're not broken for feeling this way, and you are not alone in it.

You're here now because you care deeply and want to give your child the best possible chance to understand what's really going on, and what can actually help.

Maybe you've been told to "wait and see," or to simply enroll your kids into behavioural therapy to manage behaviours without truly understanding what's causing them. But like me, you're here because you want the best for your child, and you refuse to accept that behavioural symptoms are the full story.

What many parents don't realise, because no one tells us, is that underneath the autism diagnosis, there are often treatable biological issues that affect how a child thinks, feels, and responds to the world. Once children undergo the right diagnostic testing, many are found to have one or a combination of the following:

- **Methylation sensitivities**, affecting how the body processes nutrients and detoxifies
- **Mitochondrial dysfunction**, which impacts cellular energy and repair
- **Metabolic imbalances**, such as yeast overgrowth, gut sensitivity, and poor nutrient absorption
- **Food sensitivities**, especially to gluten, casein (found in dairy), and soy
- **Cerebral folate deficiency**, meaning the brain is not receiving enough folate for communication, development, and calm regulation, even if the rest of the body has sufficient levels

What the Research Says

If you've never heard this before, you're not alone. Most mainstream approaches don't explore this layer. But the science is there:

- **Over 80% of autistic** children show signs of **mitochondrial dysfunction** (Rossignol & Frye, 2012)
- Around **70% have gut-related issues**, including dysbiosis and inflammation (Adams et al., 2011)
- Up to **44% present with cerebral folate deficiency** (Ramaekers et al., 2007)
- Many also show **high aluminium levels**, especially when their bodies are not detoxing efficiently (Exley, 2017)

And most children are being assessed in clinical environments that don't reflect who they are or how they learn. A bright, curious child may shut down or become overstimulated in these settings, leaving you with a diagnosis but no real understanding of your child's full potential.

I'm not a doctor, just a passionate mum sharing what we've learned through lived experience, conversations with other parents, and publicly available research. My hope is that it helps you feel a little less alone, a little more empowered, and a lot more hopeful as you find your own path forward.



AINA

Learning Out Loud

My name is Allyson-Aina (Aina for short), and I'm a mum of three, including twin boys diagnosed with autism. Like many of you, I wasn't searching for a label, but for answers. The diagnosis gave us a name... one that, if I'm being completely honest, scared me at first. It didn't give us the reason, and it certainly didn't come with a plan.

Our journey hasn't been straightforward. It wasn't until June 2025, when the twins turned three, that we did an Organic Acids Test (OAT) and discovered results suggesting they may have a rare genetic condition called VLCAD - a metabolic disorder that affects how the body converts fat into energy. When not managed, it can mimic autism in many ways but requires a very different approach.

Before that, we thought we were doing everything right, healthy fats, structure, love. But we were parenting in the dark. Even well-intentioned choices were making things worse.

We're still learning. Each step forward has come not from a miracle, but from asking better questions and looking deeper.

This is Chapter One of *The Healing Journal*. It's not a guide with all the answers — just a real, evolving story of what we've learned so far. The kind of insight I wish I had when we began.

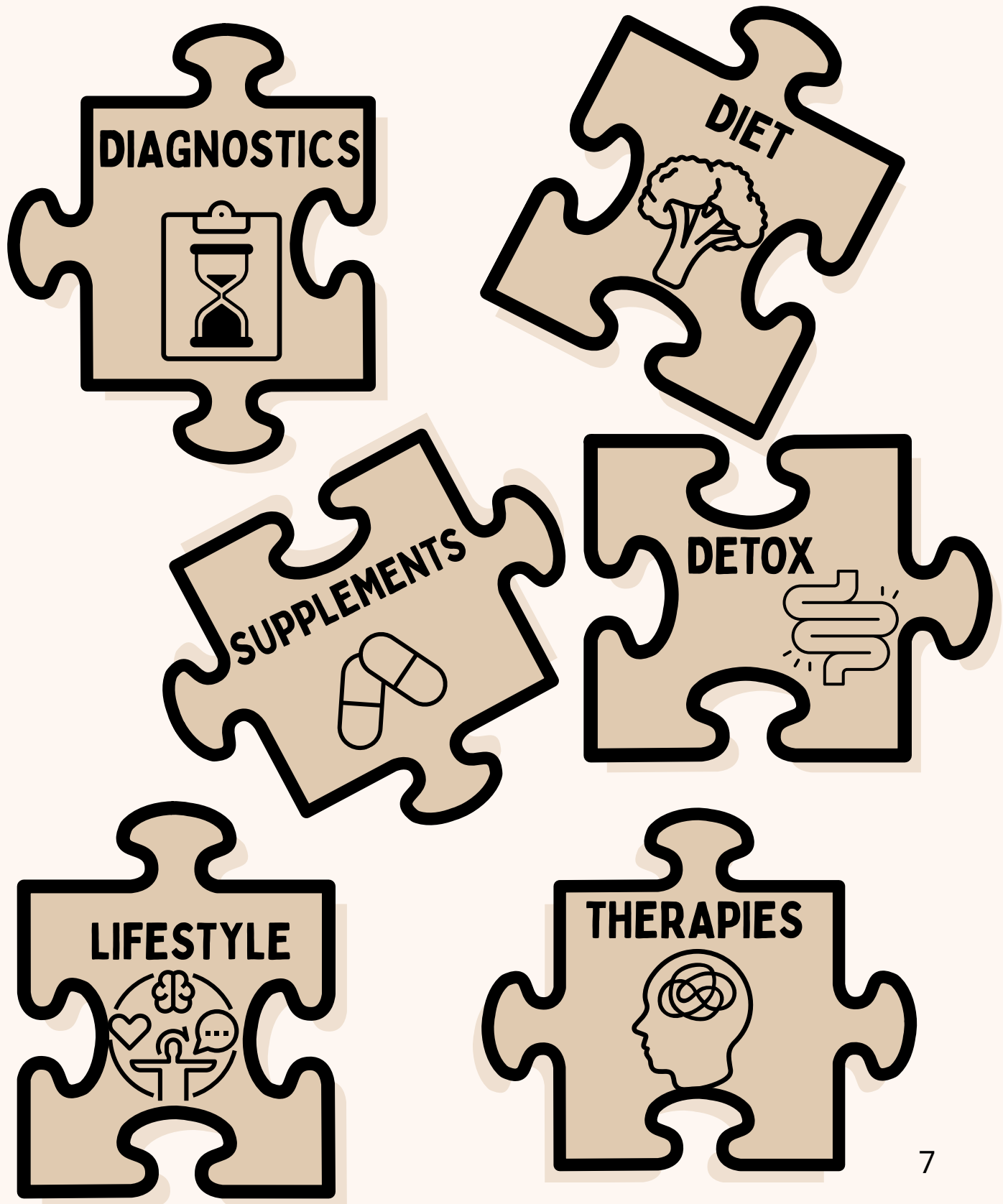
Please share it. And if something has helped your child, I'd love to hear from you too. We support our children by supporting each other.

You're not here by accident. You're not alone.
You're a parent... and that's powerful.

The Healing Puzzle:
A Visual Map of How We're Piecing
It Together

PIECING IT TOGETHER

A Visual Map of How We're Piecing It Together



A CUSTOM MAP FOR OUR CHILDREN

No two children are the same. This is the puzzle we're piecing together for our twins, based on their unique needs, symptoms, and what's actually helping. We haven't figured it all out, and the picture is still forming, but every piece we place brings us closer to healing.

We haven't completed everything on this map. It's part of a longer journey. As we learn more and observe what works, we will continue to adapt. What you see here may evolve in future chapters, because healing isn't linear, it's layered.

DIAGNOSTICS



Understanding root causes behind the symptoms

- **Genetic Testing:** Identifies inherited conditions and mutations e.g.
 - **FRA test**
 - **Whole Exome Sequencing (WES)**
 - **MTHFR** and other metabolic gene panels
- **Metabolic & Functional Testing:** Reveals how the body is functioning and identifies nutrient imbalances, gut issues, detox blocks, and yeast or bacteria overgrowth e.g.
 - **OAT** (Organic Acids Test)
 - **GI-MAP** (stool test for microbiome, pathogens, and gut inflammation)
 - **HTMA** (Hair Tissue Mineral Analysis)
 - **Mycotoxin or Heavy Metal tests**
- **Other Medical Assessments:**
 - **Blood panels for nutrient levels** (e.g. zinc, B12, iron)
 - **ALT / AST and liver/kidney function tests**
 - **Allergy or sensitivity testing** (IgG, IgE)

Note: Many of these tests can be expensive and may not be available everywhere. Please don't let that discourage you. In later chapters, I will share signs and symptoms you can look out for as an alternative way to guide diagnosis. For **our** family, diagnostic tests have been one of the most valuable tools in understanding our twins' individual needs

DIET



Remove triggers, add nourishment

A foundational area that directly impacts mood, behaviour, gut health, and inflammation. For many children, diet is where the most immediate changes begin.

- **Remove inflammatory triggers:**
 - **Gluten, casein (dairy), and soy** (also known as the GFCFSF diet)
 - These proteins can cause gut inflammation or act as opiates in sensitive children
- **Minimise or eliminate sugar and ultra-processed foods**, especially artificial dyes, sweeteners, and preservatives
- **Introduce nutrient-dense whole foods:** Cooked vegetables, healthy carbs like sweet potatoes, grass-fed protein, and broths
- **Explore fermented foods (if tolerated)** like coconut yogurt, sauerkraut, or water kefir for natural probiotic
- **Support hydration with clean, filtered water:** many children with gut or metabolic challenges are chronically dehydrated

Note: Start with one change at a time. Food aversions are common, so gradual shifts often work better than abrupt ones.

OVER 25% OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN SHOW SIGNS OF METHYLATION ISSUES... IMPACTING HOW THEY DETOX AND ABSORB NUTRIENTS.

(Boris et al., 2004; Adams et al., 2011)

A CUSTOM MAP FOR OUR CHILDREN

DETOXIFICATIONS

Clear out parasites, harmful waste and reduce internal load

- **Parasite & Yeast Cleansing:** Natural deworming every few months
- **Address yeast overgrowth with antifungals**
e.g. caprylic acid, oregano oil
- **Heavy Metal Support:** Introduce gentle binders:
 - **Silica drops** to add to your filtered water to flush toxins
 - **Bentonite clay** (start low and build slowly)
 - **Activated charcoal** (given away from food and supplements)
- **Drainage & Elimination Support:**
 - **Epsom salt baths** (magnesium sulphate supports detox & calms the nervous system)
- **Liver & Mitochondrial Support:** Support with nutrients:
 - **Milk thistle, NAC, Alpha Lipoic Acid (ALA)**
 - **CoQ10, B2 (Riboflavin), Carnitine**
 - **Minimise use of medications like paracetamol unless necessary**

SUPPLEMENTS

(based on diagnostics)

Support the body with targeted nutrients

Supplements can help correct deficiencies, support detox pathways, and reduce inflammation. What your child needs depends on their unique biology and test results.

- **Probiotics for gut repair**
 - Choose strains suited to yeast overgrowth or dysbiosis (*e.g. Saccharomyces boulardii, Lactobacillus plantarum*)
- **Methylated vitamins**
 - **B12Folate**
 - **5-MTHF or Leucovorin (Folinic acid)**
 - **B6 (P5P)** if methylation issues are present
- **Essential minerals:**
 - **Zinc**
 - **Magnesium** (*e.g. citrate or threonate*)
 - **Iron** (*if deficient*)
- **Mitochondrial and energy support**
 - **Carnitine**
 - **CoQ10/Ubiquinol**
 - **Riboflavin (B2)**
- **Detox support:**
 - **NAC, Milk thistle, ALA** (*always go slow and monitor response*)

Important: Supplements are powerful. Start low and introduce one at a time. Work with a practitioner where possible.

STUDIES SHOW THAT EPSOM SALT BATHS DELIVER MAGNESIUM THROUGH THE SKIN, WHICH HAS BEEN LINKED TO IMPROVED SLEEP AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN KIDS WITH AUTISM.

(McKee et al., Magnesium Research Journal, 2020)

MITOCHONDRIAL SUPPORT (E.G., COQ10, CARNITINE) MAY BENEFIT UP TO 80% OF CHILDREN WITH ASD WHO SHOW SIGNS OF MITOCHONDRIAL DYSFUNCTION

(Rossignol & Frye, 2021).

A CUSTOM MAP FOR OUR CHILDREN

THERAPIES

Support connection, communication, and development

Therapies are most effective when the body is supported biologically. They help translate internal improvements into external expression and function.

- **Speech & Language Therapy (SLT):** Helps with verbal and non-verbal communication, especially when paired with biomedical support
- **Occupational Therapy (OT):** Focuses on sensory regulation, motor skills, attention, and daily living
- **ABA / Play-Based Therapy:** We have opted not to do ABA for the time being but some children benefit from structured behavioural therapies or naturalistic play-based alternatives (e.g. Floortime, RDI).
- **Sensory Integration / Movement:** Activities like swinging, climbing, deep pressure, or brushing with an electric toothbrush help regulate the nervous system
- **Music, Art or Animal-Assisted Therapies:** Non-verbal outlets to support emotional expression and brain development

Note: Therapies are more impactful when your child is regulated, rested, and supported with the right nutrition and supplements.

LIFESTYLE

Create a healing environment at home

Our surroundings matter, from what we put on our skin to what we breathe in. These changes help reduce the toxic load on the body and support long-term wellbeing.

- **Reduce plastic exposure:** Especially for food and drink (e.g. switch to glass, ceramic or stainless steel)
- **Avoid synthetic fragrances** *where necessary, found in candles, air fresheners, cleaning products, body sprays, and even laundry detergent*
- **Use low-toxic personal care and cleaning products** e.g. raw unrefined shea butter, fragrance-free products (we use an app called Yuka to check toxicity of most of our food products and personal care).
- **Prioritise rest and rhythm:** Regular sleep, calming routines, and nature exposure can help regulate cortisol and support detox
- **Minimise screen time and overstimulation:** Create moments of calm, quiet, and connection each day

Reminder: You don't need to do everything at once. Start with what feels manageable and build as you go.

DR. ELIZABETH MUMPER, A LEADING INTEGRATIVE PAEDIATRICIAN, EXPLAINS THAT SUPPORTING GUT AND IMMUNE HEALTH IS FOUNDATIONAL FOR BEHAVIOUR AND LEARNING

(Adams et al., 2011)

Closing Chapter One:
With Curiosity, Not Certainty

Where We Go From Here

This first chapter was never meant to provide all the answers. It was written for those just starting out, for the parents who feel overwhelmed, unsure, and exhausted from trying to figure it all out on their own.

I want you to know that there is hope. I want you to know that you're not alone.

Every child is unique, and there's no one-size-fits-all solution. I am not a doctor — just a parent sharing what's helped us so far. We've made mistakes, changed direction, learned, unlearned, and kept going. We encourage you to consult professionals along the way and to always do what feels safe and right for your child and your family.

This is simply the first step. The beginning of what I hope will be a series of resources based on what we've learned. It's not perfect, and it's not finished. But it comes from a place of love, curiosity, and a desire to support others the way I wish we'd been supported.

If anything here has resonated with you, we hope you'll take from it what serves you and leave the rest. There is no one "right" way to support our children, but there is so much power in trying, in questioning, and in sharing what we find.

One area I will expand on in future chapters is family dynamics; how siblings, partners, and even extended family are affected by this journey. Autism doesn't just touch one child; it shifts the rhythm of the whole home. Making space for siblings' feelings, protecting moments for your marriage, and remembering your own needs are all part of sustaining the energy required for healing.

As I continue to learn, I'll be sharing more in future chapters, diving deeper into protocols, testing, behaviours, therapies, and more. Always with honesty. Always with community in mind.

With love,

Aina

*If you'd like to get in touch or share what has worked well for you, please contact:
babesandbabiespod@gmail.com*



This is only the beginning.
See you in Chapter Two.

*The information shared here is based on our personal journey and publicly available research.
Always consult your healthcare provider when making decisions for your child.*

Glossary of Terms

Here are a few key terms that have come up in this chapter and throughout the guide:

- **ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis):** A structured behavioural therapy often used with autistic children, though some families prefer play-based alternatives.
- **Cerebral Folate Deficiency (CFD):** A condition where the brain doesn't get enough folate, affecting communication, development, and calm regulation, even if the rest of the body has normal folate levels.
- **Detoxification:** The body's natural process of removing toxins and waste. In autism support, detox may involve diet, supplements, or baths to help the process.
- **GI-MAP (Gastrointestinal Microbial Assay Plus):** A stool test that shows the balance of bacteria, yeast, parasites, and inflammation in the gut.
- **HTMA (Hair Tissue Mineral Analysis):** A test using hair samples to assess mineral levels and heavy metal exposure.
- **Methylation:** A key biochemical process that helps the body process nutrients, detoxify, and regulate mood. Problems with methylation can affect energy and behaviour.
- **Mitochondria:** Tiny "power plants" in each cell that produce energy. Dysfunction can show up as fatigue, low muscle tone, or developmental delays.
- **OAT (Organic Acids Test):** A urine test that reveals imbalances in metabolism, nutrient use, and gut health.
- **Play-Based Therapy (e.g. Floortime, RDI):** Therapeutic approaches that use play and relationship-building instead of strict behavioural control.
- **Probiotics:** Supplements containing beneficial bacteria that support gut health and digestion.
- **Sensory Integration:** Activities that help a child process sensory input (like sound, touch, or movement) more effectively, e.g. swinging, climbing, or brushing.