

OPINION

# What does the brain's immunity have to do with autism?

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A growing **body of evidence** suggests that microglia — cells traditionally thought of as the brain's support system — may play a critical role in autism and related disorders. In December, the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative brought together a group of scientists studying this connection using a variety of approaches.

[Read our report on the workshop here »](#)

After reviewing the latest data and hypotheses explaining the connection, the attendees attempted to define the next steps for exploring how the brain's immunity might be involved with autism.

**Jonathan Kipnis** discussed his groundbreaking study showing that transplanting healthy bone marrow into mice that model Rett syndrome **rescues some of the symptoms of the disorder**. Yet, many questions remain about whether and what roles microglia play in autism.

What do you think?

- Are the **elevated levels of microglia** observed in autism brains causing symptoms of the disorder, or are they the reaction to an unhealthy environment? Clinically speaking, should we ultimately be looking to knock microglia down, or are they a compensatory response that we should enhance?
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that autism symptoms **become less severe** during periods of fever. Could microglia play a role in this phenomenon? If so, how?

- **What markers exist for measuring or estimating levels of microglia in people with autism or other disorders?**

Share your thoughts in the comments section below.

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