Feeding Difficulties in Angelman Syndrome

It is estimated that over 60% of children display a range of eating problems and a narrow range of food preferences relative to children with intellectual disability without Angelman syndrome. Abnormal eating behaviour also occurs more frequently in Angelman syndrome when compared to two other genetic syndromes (fragile X syndrome and 1p36 syndrome). There is emerging research to suggest that eating behaviours may differ across genetic subtypes, with children with Angelman syndrome caused by Uniparental Disomy showing a higher frequency of hyperphagia (excessive appetite) compared to children with Angelman syndrome caused by a deletion.

Preliminary results from a research study being conducted at the University of Birmingham suggests that food related problems may be present in a similar proportion of children and adults with Angelman syndrome as in people with Prader-Willi syndrome. To read more about this ongoing research click here.

But, recent research (Salminen, Crespi & Mokkonen, 2019) has highlighted Prader-Willi and Angelman syndromes show evidence of opposite alterations in hyperphagic food selectivity, with more paternally biased genetic causes of Angelman syndrome apparently involving increased preference for complementary foods (“baby foods”); hedonic reward from eating may also be increased in Angelman syndrome and decreased in Prader-Willi syndrome.

There are a small number of reports which suggest that food related difficulties may lead to higher rates of obesity in individuals with Angelman syndrome, although the overall number of children with Angelman syndrome who are overweight is unknown. It may also be related to mobility issues and decreased movement when older.