Today’s piece was prepared by Rachel Baker, MD, based on a NY Times story [Guinea Pigs Are Autistic Child’s Best Friend](http://mobile.nytimes.com/blogs/well/2015/06/29/guinea-pigs-are-autistic-childs-best-friend/).

This article discusses the social benefits of allowing autistic children to interact with guinea pigs. Specifically, it discusses a recent study published in *Developmental Psychobiology* that reported decreased levels of arousal and anxiety in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) during social interactions when playing with a guinea pig as compared to their playing toys alone.

This article’s tone is persuasive regarding benefits of interactions with guinea pigs among children with and without ASD children. It surveyed the recent scientific literature, discussing several studies that demonstrated an array of benefits from such animal interactions and by providing supportive quotes from leading figures in autism research and management (several of whom conducted the aforementioned studies). The NY Times article does not describe such interactions as therapy or suggest that guinea pigs should or could replace other therapies to aid ASD children with social development. Instead, it suggests that guinea pigs, and potentially other animals, could be used as “social buffers” for ASD children to help decrease the anxiety of social interactions, as seemingly conveyed by some of the interviewed experts. It is careful not to claim that guinea pig interactions alone could teach social skills but rather that they could be used as an opportunity for ASD children to practice them. A review of the mentioned scientific articles will reveal that having children with ASD play with guinea pigs is a relatively new area of study and that more needs to be done to further characterize the benefits and underlying origin of such positive human-animal interactions in ASD, particularly with application toward prosocial development.

**RESOURCES ON AUTISM:**

[Centers for Disease Control – Autism information](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html) *Provides families with general overview of ASD and also provides links to helpful scientific articles, resources and methods for establishing care for their children.*

[AAP: Council on Children with Disabilities - Autism](https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/Committees-Councils-Sections/Council-on-Children-with-Disabilities/Pages/Autism.aspx) *Information and resources for professionals & families*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!