

Questions for the paediatrician

Folate, leucovorin and autism

This is not advice. It is a list of questions from a parent whose son takes folinic acid on prescription, so that you and your doctor are looking at the same thing.

In three sentences

The brain cannot make folate; it imports it from the blood through one main door. In some autistic children the immune system makes antibodies that block that door, so folate in the blood is normal but folate in the brain is low. Leucovorin (folinic acid) is a form of folate that can use a second, smaller door the antibodies do not block — if there is enough of it.

Where the evidence stands, September 2026

STRONG	In a very rare genetic condition — cerebral folate deficiency with a FOLR1 variant — leucovorin is standard treatment. The FDA approved it for exactly that on 10 March 2026.
PLAUSIBLE, NOT PROVEN	That folate-receptor antibodies explain symptoms in autism more broadly.
ONE GOOD SMALL TRIAL	Frye 2018: 48 children, 12 weeks, verbal communication improved. The largest trial (2024) was retracted in 2026. In 2026 the Child Neurology Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics said the evidence does not support it as standard treatment for autism.

The questions

- Given that the FRAT antibody test isn't recommended as a basis for decisions, what would you look at instead?**
The professional bodies point to genetic testing first: chromosomal microarray, fragile X, and exome sequencing where indicated.
- Is there anything more common we should check first?**
For example hearing, sleep, constipation or pain, iron and vitamin D.
- If we try folinic acid anyway, how will we know whether it's working — and when do we stop?**
Agree before starting: what you will watch, for how many weeks, and which result means stop.
- Should B12 be checked?**
High doses of folinic or folic acid can hide a vitamin B12 deficiency.
- Does anything our child already takes change this?**
Especially epilepsy medication or risperidone.

Notes from the appointment

Sources: Frye RE et al., Molecular Psychiatry 2018 · Child Neurology Society, position statement, March 2026 · American Academy of Pediatrics, FAQs for clinicians, 13 February 2026 · FDA approval for cerebral folate deficiency, 10 March 2026 · retraction of Panda et al. 2024, January 2026.