

# MEAL RELIEF

*Feeding program helps 7-year-old with autism enjoy a healthier diet*

Until recently, feeding their son had always been an enormous concern for Samuel and Jill Jolley. Diagnosed with autism at age 2, Brandon developed severe food aversions that persisted for five years despite numerous therapy programs.

“He was eating mainly snack foods like crackers and chips, and most of his nutrition came from PediaSure and V8,” says Samuel. “A lot of doctors said he was fine, but we were still concerned about his long-term health.”

But last summer, all that changed. Hoping to expand their son’s nutritional intake, the Jolleys enrolled Brandon in a new program at the Bethesda Center for Pediatric Development.

## Culinary Adventures

The Bethesda Health Intensive Feeding Program helps children 18 months and older change behaviors that prevent them from tolerating certain foods. Tailored to children

who are gastroonomy-tube dependent, have severe food aversions, poor weight gain and/or difficulty transitioning to age-appropriate foods, the program involves daily therapy sessions.

Samuel and Jill committed to taking Brandon to the program every day and diligently practiced what Brandon learned at home. By week three, he was consuming foods from every food group, and the next week he graduated from the program.

“Brandon received therapy three times a day—breakfast, lunch and a mid-afternoon snack—where we presented new foods to him using the sequential oral sensory (SOS) approach. He did really well,” says Andrea Alifano, a speech language pathologist who treated Brandon.

To help him learn to tolerate new foods, the team presented him with foods that shared the same color and texture as the foods he was already familiar with. For example, says Alifano, “Brandon eats cheese crackers so we presented an orange slice of cheese in the shape of a square. The cracker has a letter ‘G’ on it, so we made the letter ‘G’ on the piece of cheese so it wasn’t that different from what he was typically eating, and then we branched

off from there.”

The technique was a success. Now 8 pounds heavier, Brandon brings a lunchbox containing age-appropriate foods to school, and he’s willing to try just about anything new.

“He pretty much eats everything a healthy adult would eat,” says Samuel.

“He eats salads and vegetables, grilled chicken, steak, pork chops, rice, carrots, peas, eggs, waffles, French toast—you name it. We’re grateful and very pleased.”

## Brandon Continues to Surprise

“This year when we asked Brandon what he wanted to be for Halloween, he said he wanted to go as a pizza!” exclaims Jill. “The program really has been life-changing for us.

Just in our day-to-day routine, everything we do, it’s nothing short of a miracle.” ➔



Taylor Thomas, speech language pathologist, was one of the therapists who helped Brandon Jolley, 7, learn to enjoy an expanded diet through the Bethesda Health Intensive Feeding Program.

## TO LEARN MORE

For more information about the Bethesda Health Intensive Feeding Program, contact the Bethesda Health Center for Pediatric Development at **561-374-5712**.