



Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability. People with ASD may communicate and interact in ways that are different from most other people. ASD includes what the American Psychiatric Association used to call autistic disorder, Asperger syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified.

ASD is called a "spectrum" disorder because people with ASD can have a range of strengths and challenges, and need more or less support for those challenges. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged.



Signs

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) begins before the age of three. For many parents, children with ASD appear to follow a typical developmental path until the age of two or three years. However, researchers who study early signs of ASD in the first 18 months of life have found some promising results, although no widely accepted screening tool exists yet for children that young. Providers need to continue to be alert to signs of ASD throughout the first three years of life and to signs of undiagnosed ASD in all children, youth, and adults.

People with ASD often have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and typically last throughout a person's life.



Diagnosis

Diagnosing ASD can be difficult since there is no medical test – like a blood test – to diagnose the condition. Instead, doctors must look at the child or adult's development and social behavior to make an assessment. Standardized screening and diagnostic tools are available for adults and children age three years and older.

ASD can sometimes be detected at 18 months or younger. By age 2, a diagnosis by an experienced professional can be considered very reliable. However, many children do not receive a final diagnosis until much older. Some people are not diagnosed until they are adolescents or adults. This delay means that children with ASD might not get the early help they need.

Standardized screening and diagnostic tools are available for children age three years and older.



Diagnosis



CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." program provides free resources to help families monitor developmental milestones and recognize signs of developmental concerns, including ASD.

As children with ASD become adolescents and young adults, they might have difficulties developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job.



Diagnosis

They may also come to the attention of healthcare providers because they have co-occurring conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety or depression, or conduct disorder.

Monitoring, screening, evaluating, and diagnosing children with ASD as early as possible is important to make sure children receive the services and supports they need to reach their full potential.

Every autistic individual will experience symptoms differently and on a mild to severe spectrum making some diagnosis difficult.



Diagnosis

Early signs of ASD can include, but are not limited to:

- **Avoids or does not keep eye contact**
- **Does not respond to name by 9 months of age**
- **Does not show facial expressions like happy, sad, angry, and surprised by 9 months of age**
- **Does not play simple interactive games like pat-a-cake by 12 months of age**
- **Uses few or no gestures by 12 months**
- **Does not share interests with others**
- **Does not point or look at what you point at**
- **Does not pretend in play**
- **Shows little interest in peers**
- **Has trouble understanding other people's feelings**
- **Does not play games with turn-taking by 60 months of age**



Treatment



Currently, no treatment has been shown to cure ASD, but several interventions have been developed and studied for use with young children. These interventions may reduce symptoms, improve cognitive ability and daily living skills, and maximize the ability of the child to function and participate in the community.

The differences in how ASD affects each person means that people with ASD have unique strengths and challenges in social communication, behavior, and cognitive ability. Therefore, treatment plans are usually multidisciplinary, may involve parent-mediated interventions, and target the child's individual needs.



Treatment

Behavioral intervention strategies have focused on social communication skill development—particularly at young ages when the child would naturally be gaining these skills—and reduction of restricted interests and repetitive and challenging behaviors.

For some children, occupational and speech therapy may be helpful, as could social skills training and medication in older children. The best treatment or intervention can vary depending on an individual's age, strengths, challenges, and differences.

There are many types of treatments available. These include applied behavior analysis, social skills training, occupational therapy, physical therapy, sensory integration therapy, and the use of assistive technology.



Treatment



The types of treatments generally can be broken down into the following categories:

- **Behavior and Communication Approaches**
- **Dietary Approaches**
- **Medication**
- **Complementary and Alternative Medicine**

Research shows that early diagnosis and interventions, such as during preschool or before, are more likely to have major positive effects on symptoms and later skills.

Many people with ASD benefit from treatment, no matter how old they are when they are diagnosed. People of all ages, at all levels of ability, can often improve after well-designed interventions.

For more information about ASD visit www.autismspeaks.org or www.autism-society.org

