

AUTISM

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn and behave. ¹

Autism is known as a spectrum disorder because there is wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms people experience. ¹

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Boys are approximately four times more likely to be affected by autism than girls.
- Signs of autism usually appear by ages 2 or 3-years old but can be diagnosed as early as 18 months old.
- Sensory sensitivities and medical issues such as gastrointestinal disorders, seizures, sleep disorders, anxiety, depression and attention issues often accompany autism.
- Some people with autism may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and live entirely independently in adulthood.
- Research shows that early intervention leads to positive outcomes later in life for people with autism.
- Many people with autism may also struggle with sleep, constipation, eating, self-injurious behavior and aggression.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

- Applied behavioral analysis (ABA).
 - TEACCH/Structured teaching method.
 - Developmental and relationship-based therapies.
 - Occupational therapy.
- Targeted medication for specific symptomatology:
- Irritability
 - Aggression
 - Repetitive behavior
 - Hyperactivity
 - Attention problems
 - Anxiety and depression ²

COMMON SYMPTOMS

The following symptoms can be seen at any age and may indicate a child is at risk of developing autism:

- Loss of previously acquired speech, babbling or social skills.
- Avoidance of eye contact.
- Persistent preference for solitude.
- Difficulty understanding other people's feelings.
- Delayed language development.
- Persistent repetition of words or phrases (echolalia).
- Resistance to minor changes in routine or surroundings.
- Restricted interests.
- Repetitive behaviors (flapping, rocking, spinning, etc.).
- Unusual and intense reactions to sounds, smells, tastes, textures, lights and/or colors. ^{2,6}

Autism is a SPECTRUM so while there are similarities in individuals there are also a lot of differences and it is crucial to support the individual tailored to their specific needs and preferences. ⁴

WAYS TO SUPPORT

There is no proven single treatment option or medication for ASD; treatment methods will be dependent on the individual.

It is important to understand children with autism see the world differently, and it is OK if they do, and it should be respected. **Acceptance** of who your child is without trying to change who they are is key. ²

Autism needs **early** support as soon as possible. When you see signs of autism it's important to get evaluated and treated sooner rather than later. ³

RESOURCES TO HELP

- aacap.org
 - okautism.org
 - National Autism Association
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REFERENCES

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3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2024). *Autism Information*
4. Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (n.d.) *About Autism*
5. HelpGuide (n.d.) *Helping Your Child with Autism Thrive*
6. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)*. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

STEPS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AT HOME

1. Learn and educate yourself on autism (reading this guide is the first step). ¹
2. Accept your child for who they are.
3. Learn your child's triggers and preferences.
4. Be consistent between school, home and any treatments of therapy.
5. Develop and maintain a structured schedule.
6. Use positive reinforcement.
7. Create a safe space at home for your child to feel secure.
8. Find creative ways to connect with your child in their own way — this may end up being nonverbal. ⁵