



Autism



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What is autism?

Autism is a developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It is characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior. It is a spectrum condition thus the condition can affect the client in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may have accompanying learning disabilities and need a lifetime of specialist support. Males are more likely to have an ASD than females.

What are some common signs of autism?

Since it is a spectrum condition, their problems varies in severity and intensity. Generally it includes three main areas of symptoms :

1. Social impairments

They often avoid eye contact and give less attention to social stimuli, smile. They look at others less often, and respond less to their own name

They do not like interacting with others, initiating interaction or sharing
They may be socially inappropriate at times

2. Communication difficulties

Their language development is usually delayed, and some even cannot express themselves. Even if they can speak, they have less tendency to communicate with others or their form of communication is different
There is less joint attention or sharing and some may have delayed echolalia

Communication is mostly related to making requests

Lacks imaginative/symbolic play; and have poor imaginative skills and understanding to abstract thinking when getting older

3. Repetitive or restricted behavior

Limited in interest, or activity, such as preoccupation with a toy or game
Ritualistic behavior involves an unvarying pattern of daily activities, such as a fixed route to school and resists to change. May get agitated or have temper outburst when being interrupted

Repetitive movement, such as hand flapping, head rolling, or body rocking

May also experience over- or under- sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colors

Some will also have emotional, behavioural and/or learning problems while some may have other difficulties such as hyperactive, inattentive, self-injury, sleep difficulties and violent behaviours

What causes autism?

The exact cause of autism is still being investigated. However, research suggests that a combination of factors :

Genetic and environmental may account for changes in brain development. Autism is not caused by a person's upbringing, their social circumstances and is not the fault of the individual with the condition.

How is autism treated?

There is no cure for ASDs. Therapies and behavioral interventions are designed to remedy specific symptoms and can bring about substantial improvement. The ideal treatment plan coordinates therapies and interventions that meet the specific needs of individual and encourage maximal independence in life. Family counseling for the parents and siblings of children with an ASD often helps families cope with the particular challenges of living with a child with an ASD.

Medications:

Doctors may prescribe medications for treatment of specific autism-related symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Antipsychotic medications are used to treat severe behavioral problems. Seizures can be treated with one or more anticonvulsant drugs. Medication used to treat people with attention deficit disorder can be used effectively to help decrease impulsivity and hyperactivity.

For many children, symptoms improve with treatment and with age. During adolescence, some children with an ASD may become depressed or experience behavioral problems, and their treatment may need some modification as they transition to adulthood. People with an ASD usually continue to need services and supports as they get older, but many are able to work successfully and live independently or within a supportive environment.