

Understanding Autism

Autism is also called autism spectrum disorder or ASD. It is a lifelong condition that can affect how a child learns, plays, communicates, and acts with others. The word spectrum means range. There is a range of how severe the impact of autism can be.

Many treatments can help. Early support and care are key to helping a child learn, grow, and thrive. There are many adults with autism who have jobs and meaningful relationships.

Why Does Autism Happen?

Autism is not caused by anything a parent did or did not do. About 1 out of every 31 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with ASD. Boys are more likely to have it than girls.

ASD is related to how the brain grows and develops. Autism may run in families. It can also happen when changes called mutations occur in a child's genes. These changes are no one's fault.

Researchers continue to study the causes of autism. Things that may raise the chance of it include:

- Having a family member with ASD
- Being born very early
- Exposure to certain chemicals or viruses during pregnancy

There is no evidence that vaccines cause autism.



Children with autism may be sensitive to loud sounds or bright lights.

Early Signs and Symptoms of Autism

Children with autism may show signs as early as 12 to 18 months old. Here are some common signs:

- Does not respond to their name
- Avoids eye contact
- Has trouble with back-and-forth talking or play
- Repeats words or actions over and over, such as lining up toys
- Gets very upset by small changes
- Has strong interests in certain things
- May not point or show objects to others by age 18 months
- May not use words by age 2
- Reacts strongly to sounds, lights, or textures

Not all children with autism show the same signs.

As they grow, some children may talk a lot, while others may not talk at all. Some may want to be alone, while others enjoy being around people but need help learning how to act and socialize.

Some children with autism will find learning easy, while many may struggle. Some children with ASD move their bodies again and again in the same way, such as flapping their arms.

Diagnosis and Testing

If your child shows signs of autism, your care team may:

- Talk to you about your child's behavior, speech, and development
- Watch how your child plays and interacts with others
- Use checklists or screening tools to see how your child is doing in certain areas, like talking, moving, and playing

- Have you see a specialist like a developmental pediatrician, child psychologist, or speech therapist for more testing

There is no blood test or scan that can diagnose autism. It is diagnosed by asking parents questions and watching how your child acts and grows.



Therapy helps children with autism learn new skills.

Treatment

There is no cure for autism, but many therapies and supports can help your child learn, grow, and do well.

Therapy

Therapies are the main way to help children with autism.

- **Speech therapy:** This helps with talking and understanding words. It can help a child learn to “give and take” when talking to others.
- **Occupational therapy:** This helps with everyday tasks like eating, getting dressed, and writing.
- **Behavioral therapy:** This type of therapy teaches new skills and helps with behavior. One common type is applied behavior analysis, also called ABA.
- **Physical therapy:** If needed, this can help with movement, balance, and muscle tone.

Medicines

There are no medicines that treat autism itself. Some children may take medicine to help with:

- Anxiety or worry
- Trouble sleeping
- Aggressive behavior
- Attention or hyperactivity problems

Always talk to your care team before giving your child any medicine.

Other Supports

As children with autism get older, they may get help from:

- Special education services at school
- Social skills groups to help them learn how to make friends
- Support from community groups or programs

Autism at Home

Here are some ways to make home life easier:

- **Create a routine:** Many children with autism feel better with a daily schedule.
- **Use clear and simple language:** Short instructions help your child understand what to do.
- **Give extra time:** Your child may need more time to respond or do a task.
- **Use pictures or visuals:** This can help your child understand what is expected of them.
- **Notice and comment on good behavior:** Let your child know when they do something well.

Self-Care for Parents

- **Take breaks when needed:** Caring for a child with autism can be hard work. When possible, find a trusted friend or caretaker to be with your child for a few hours so you can take a break.
- **Join a parent support group:** Talking to other parents can help you feel less alone.



- **Learn about autism:** The more you know, the more confident you can feel in helping your child.

Thank You for Choosing Us

Thank you for trusting us with your child's care. We are here to support you and want you and your child to feel your best. Contact us with any questions.

IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.

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