

Anxiety and depression

Some people with an ASD also suffer from anxiety and/or depression. This is more common as children get older and become more socially aware. Social expectations also increase with age so it can become even more difficult to keep up with peers. The stress of this can accumulate over time and make a person vulnerable to feeling constantly worried or hopeless. Mood and problematic behavior changes over time should be discussed with therapists and primary doctors.

Genetic disorders

Some individuals have ASD as a part of a genetic disorder, such as Fragile X syndrome. Others may have a dual diagnosis of ASD with another syndrome like Down Syndrome. Being tested for a genetic disorder is considered best practice for people with an ASD diagnosis. It will not change the ASD diagnosis, but it may help explain why a person has these difficulties or indicate that other medical conditions should be monitored. It can also help in family planning and understanding if others in the family may be at risk for passing on a syndrome to their children.

Gastrointestinal and feeding disorders

Some people with ASD report gastrointestinal (GI) or stomach problems. Children and adults with ASD are sometimes very picky eaters and may have difficulty swallowing or even tolerating certain food in their mouth. Children with an ASD may have problems such as chronic constipation or diarrhea. These difficulties should be discussed with your medical providers so they can be addressed sooner rather than later. This may include a referral to a GI specialist, feeding/ swallowing clinic or supportive therapies like occupational therapy or speech-language therapy.

Sleeping problems

Many people with ASD have trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep at night. This can be very hard on the whole family. If you or your child is having trouble with sleep, talk to your doctor about things you can do to help, possibly including behavioral interventions, medical treatment, or a sleep study.



What causes ASD?

Scientists do not know what causes ASD. There is a lot of research being done to answer that question. Let your clinical team know if you would like to get involved. It is likely that within the next 20 years there will be much more information available to explain the diversity and presence of ASD around the world. For now, there are some things that are widely accepted.

- ASD is caused by the way the brain develops, likely beginning very early in development.
- There is not one single cause of ASD. There are likely multiple factors that may make a child more likely to experience ASD.
- Genes are one of the risk factors. ASD often runs in families. A child with a sibling or parent who has ASD is more likely to have ASD, too.

What does not cause ASD?

The causes of ASD have not been determined, but some things have been ruled out.

- There have been many large, high-quality studies done, and no link between vaccines and ASD has been found.
- Bad parenting was once thought to be a cause of ASD. This is not true.
- Some people wonder whether diet during pregnancy is a factor, but there is no research to support this. Many ethnic groups around the world have similar ASD rates and their diets are very different.

