

CARING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH AUTISM



Autism is a brain development disorder that shows its first signs in early childhood. It results in a lifelong disorder.

Autism affects social interaction, reasoning, and communication.



No one knows why children get autism, but it occurs more often in boys than in girls.

Children with autism want to be alone in their crib or bed, sometimes for many hours. They don't want to be disturbed, and they don't want attention.



What Is Autism?

Autism is a brain development disorder that shows its first signs in early childhood. It results in a lifelong disorder with problems in reasoning, social interaction, and communication. Children with autism become self-focused, lose ability to relate to others, and have trouble with language, reasoning, and play.

What Causes Autism?

The cause is unknown, and autism cannot be prevented. It occurs more in boys than in girls and more in some families. Autism may result from chemical changes in the brain. Conditions affecting brain development before, during, or after birth may play a role.

It isn't due to immunizations, bad parenting, or a behavior disorder, however.

What Are the Symptoms of Autism?

Some children have mild symptoms, others have worse symptoms. Symptoms include turning inward and withdrawing from society. Some symptoms start when children are very young, even 1 to 2 years old. Children don't make eye contact, smile, or cuddle. They want to stay alone in a crib or bed, sometimes for many hours. They don't want to be disturbed. They don't want attention. They are quiet and passive. They may repeat gestures or behaviors, such as flicking fingers, arranging objects, and insisting on rituals. Autistic children have short attention spans.

Older children may be overly sensitive to sounds, smells, touch, or taste. They may lack imaginative play. They may not learn to speak when expected.

Children react to changes in the home or in the usual routine with temper tantrums. At about age 5 to 6, self-isolation, tantrums, and rituals tend to occur less often. Even then, children don't learn language and social skills normally. However, some children older than 10 have had a normal school education, and some adults with autism have lived alone and held jobs.

How Is Autism Diagnosed?

No specific test is available. A team of doctors and others makes the diagnosis. This team includes a neurologist (doctor specializing in nervous system diseases), psychologist, pediatrician, speech therapist, and learning consultant.

Tests may be done to rule out other illnesses.



A team of doctors and others, including a neurologist (specialist in nervous system illness), pediatrician, and speech therapist, should be involved, because no test can tell whether a child has autism.



Therapy at an early age can help your child develop fine motor skills and speech and communication skills.

Your health care provider might also prescribe medicine for your child, for specific symptoms.



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How Is Autism Treated?

No cure exists, but with proper help children can learn to cope with symptoms.

Early intensive interventions are the most successful. Life-long follow-up care will be needed. Therapy may include speech and language, occupational, and physical therapies. Therapy can help children learn how to communicate better, improve fine muscle movement, and help develop strength, coordination, and movement.

The health care provider and counselor may suggest music therapy, behavior modification, and specific diets.

There are no specific medicines to treat autism. Sometimes, the health care provider may suggest medicine to treat specific symptoms.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Autism:

- ✓ **DO** provide a regular routine in your home to help reduce repetitive behaviors.
- ✓ **DO** enroll your child in a treatment program that is led by a team of doctors and counselors.
- ✓ **DO** check out support services and local support groups for parents or caretakers.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have questions about your child's health or need information about services for autistic children.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your child has problems related to medicine, or if symptoms worsen.
- ⊗ **DON'T** deny your child the opportunity to reach full potential. Children with autism can be creative but need structure.
- ⊗ **DON'T** accept traditional therapies as the only methods.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- Autism Society of America
Tel: (800) 3AUTISM (328-8476), (301) 657-0881
Website: <http://www.autism-society.org>
- Autism Research Institute
Tel: (866) 366-3361
Website: <http://www.autism.com>
- Autism Collaboration
Website: <http://www.autism.org>