



Autism Spectrum Disorder



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This document has been translated into other languages.
In case of any discrepancy or inconsistency, the English version shall prevail.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder 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. Autism spectrum disorder is a spectrum condition and it can affect the client in different ways. Some people with autism spectrum disorder 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 autism spectrum disorder than females. People with autism spectrum disorder have evidence of unusual development before the age of 3.

What are some common signs of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

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 lack eye contact and give less attention to social stimuli. 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, causing embarrassment.

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.

4. Other symptoms

- 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 hyperactivity, inattention, self-injury, sleep difficulties and violent behaviours.

What are the causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

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

Genetic and environmental factors 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 Spectrum Disorder treated?

There is no cure for autism spectrum disorder. 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 often helps families to cope with the particular challenges of living with an autistic child.

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. Medication used to treat people with attention deficit disorder can be used effectively to help decreasing impulsivity and hyperactivity.

For many children, symptoms improve with treatment. During adolescence, some children with autism spectrum disorder may become depressed or experience behavioral problems, and their treatment may need some modification as they transit to adulthood. People with autism spectrum disorder 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.