




AUTISM

WHAT IS AUTISM?



- Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication.
- An autistic person's needs, strengths and challenges may change over time.
- Some people still use the word "Asperger's syndrome" which is a previously used diagnosis on the autism spectrum.
 - It is equal to a level 1 autism diagnosis.
 - The term was retired from use by medical professionals several years ago.

The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear



Less autistic

Very autistic

**The Autism Spectrum
looks more like:**



- Red: Social differences
- Orange: Interests
- Yellow: Repetitions
- Light green: Sensory sensitivities
- Teal: Emotional regulation
- Blue: Perception
- Pink: Executive functioning
- Pink: Other

DIAGNOSIS

There is no blood or medical test for autism diagnosis. It is diagnosed based on observation, questionnaires, and interviews with others.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 in 44 children in the United States today.

DIAGNOSING ASD

Though it can be diagnosed at any age, on average, ASD is diagnosed before age 5 with signs and symptoms generally appearing in the first two years of life.



Anybody can be autistic, regardless of sex, age, race or ethnicity.



Getting a diagnosis is also harder for autistic adults, who often learn to “mask”, or hide, their autism symptoms.



Research shows that boys get diagnosed with autism four times more often than girls.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

Developmental tests may be recommended to identify if a child has delays in cognitive, language, and social skills if the child:

- Doesn't respond with a smile or happy expression by 6 months.
- Doesn't mimic sound or facial expressions by 9 months.
- Doesn't babble or coo by 12 months.
- Doesn't gesture, such as point or wave, by 14 months.
- Doesn't say single words by 16 months.
- Doesn't play "make-believe" or pretend by 18 months.
- Doesn't say two-word phrases by 24 months.
- Loses language skills or social skills at any age.

CAUSES

The infographic features a dark blue background. On the left, a dark blue hexagonal shape contains the word 'CAUSES' in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. To the right of this hexagon is a large dark blue circle, also divided into two equal halves by a thin white vertical line. The left half of the circle contains white text stating that scientists are still investigating the cause of ASD. The right half contains white text stating that while there are known contributing factors, a single factor may not cause autism. The overall design is clean and modern, with light blue curved lines in the bottom right corner.

Scientists and researchers are still investigating the cause of ASD.

While there are known contributing factors, it is apparent that a single factor may not cause autism.



CAUSES OF AUTISM

❖ **VACCINES DO NOT CAUSE AUTISM**

❖ **AUTISM IS NOT CAUSED BY PARENTING**

- It is known that abnormalities in brain structure and function can cause ASD.
- Numerous factors affect this condition, but most of the factors that do are either genetic or environmental.
- Studies have shown that a child may be genetically predisposed for autism, but it is not caused by genes alone.
- In most cases, the genetic factor needs to be triggered by an environmental factor to develop ASD.



RISK FACTORS

➡ **Multiple risk factors can contribute and include:**

- ❖ **Genetics**
- ❖ **Pregnancy**
- ❖ **Older parents at conception**
- ❖ **Environmental factors**
- ❖ **Biological causes**
- ❖ **Abnormal digestive conditions**

SYMPTOMS

Each child with autism spectrum disorder is likely to have a unique pattern of behavior and level of severity.

Signs are usually seen by age 2 though some infants may have reduced eye contact, lack of response to their name, or indifference to caregivers. Others may develop normally but then suddenly show symptoms.

Social Communication and Interaction

Common signs include:

- Fails to respond to name and appears to not hear at times.
- Resists cuddling, holding. Prefers playing alone.
- Poor eye contact, lacks facial expression.
- Delayed or no speech or loses previous ability to say words or sentences.
- Speaks with abnormal tone or rhythm. May use a singsong voice.
- Repeats words or phrases but doesn't understand how to use them.
- Doesn't appear to understand simple questions or directions.
- Has difficulty recognizing nonverbal cues.
- Doesn't express emotions or feelings.
- Unaware of other's feelings.



Patterns of Behavior

Common signs include:

Performs repetitive movements – rocking, spinning, etc.

Performs activities that could cause self-harm, such as biting or head-banging.

Develops specific routines/rituals. Becomes disturbed by change.

Problems with coordination. May have odd body language.

May be unusually sensitive to light, sound, or touch, yet may be indifferent to pain or temperature.

Fixates on an object or activity with abnormal intensity.

Has specific food preferences and may refuse foods with a certain texture.

LEVELS OF AUTISM

There are three levels of autism spectrum disorder.

While they once were interpreted as a level of function, the level of autism now refers to support needs and the person's independence.

Each autistic person is diagnosed as Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 based on the DSM-5, with Level 3 requiring the most support.



Level 1

Requiring support

May have a hard time communicating.
May not be able to read social cues and body language.
May have trouble moving from one activity to another or trying new things.

Support Needs May Include:

- Therapy designed to boost communication and social skills.
- Support at school or work, including help with environmental factors like lighting or noise.
- Independent living skills, to build confidence with managing a home or planning a schedule.
- Identifying any mental health needs and appropriate treatment.



Level 2

Requiring substantial support

Often have very specific interests.

May have atypical social behavior including repetitive behaviors or self stimulation.

Self-stimulation (stimming) may be used to self-regulate internally.

Stimming behavior may be due to their heightened sensitivity to surrounds such as noise levels, light, temperature, texture, etc.

Support Needs May Include:

- Speech therapy to assist with verbal communication.
- Behavioral therapy to promote flexibility and help with stimming or repetition.
- Assistive technologies and tools to help with independent living skills.



Level 3

Requiring very substantial support

Have severe communication deficits, such as being nonspeaking.

Have higher difficulty with self-regulation and have repetitive behaviors like rocking or spinning.

Have extreme distress when asked to switch tasks.

High Support Needs May Include:

- Alternative speech and communication strategies for non-verbal people such as augmentative and alternative communication devices or using social stories.
- Routine or round-the-clock care to ensure feeding, bathing, and other basic needs are met.
- Medication and other treatments for physical, cognitive, and mental health concerns.



AUTISM SUPPORT

- The three levels do not entirely encompass the traits and experiences of all autistic people, and the DSM-5 offers little specificity regarding the types of support that individuals need or situations when support is needed.
- Assigning people to one of the three levels of autism can be useful for understanding what types of services and supports would serve them best. It won't, however, predict or account for unique details in their personality and behavior, which means the support and services they receive will need to be highly individualized.



MEDICAL CONDITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ASD



MANY MEDICAL CONDITIONS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH AUTISM INCLUDING:

- **Gastrointestinal disorders:**
 - ❖ chronic constipation
 - ❖ abdominal pain
 - ❖ GERD
 - ❖ bowel inflammation
- **Epilepsy**
- **Feeding issues**
- **Disrupted sleep**
- **Headaches**



OTHER RELATED CONDITIONS INCLUDE:

- **Tuberous sclerosis**
- **Fragile X syndrome**
- **Intellectual impairment**
- **Prader-Willi syndrome**
- **Auto-immune conditions including:**
 - ❖ **Type 1 diabetes**
 - ❖ **Rheumatoid arthritis**
 - ❖ **Ulcerative colitis**
 - ❖ **Celiac disease**

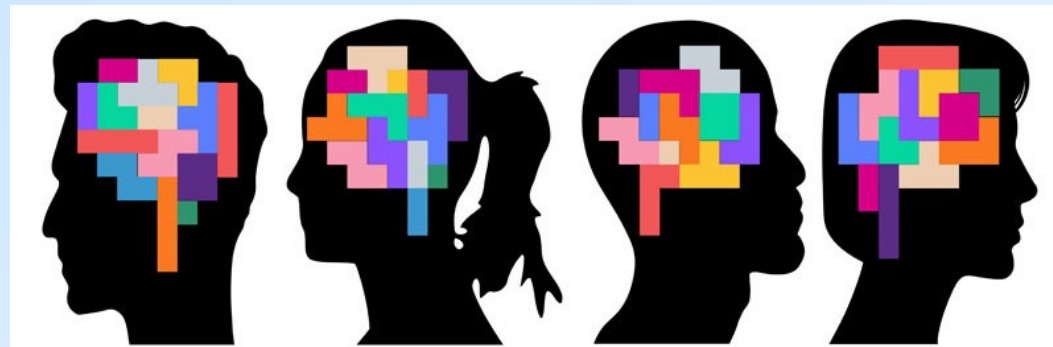


DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT ASD

MYTH #1: AUTISTIC PEOPLE ARE ALL ALIKE

FACT:

- Autism is a spectrum. This means it affects different people in different ways.
- Some people may have a greater number of challenges, while others may have subtler differences.
- Skills and abilities can also vary widely. Every person is unique, with their own strengths, challenges, and personality.



MYTH #2: AUTISTIC PEOPLE LACK EMOTION AND EMPATHY

FACT:

- People with autism experience a full range of emotions, just like others do.
- The difference lies in how they express and understand these emotions.
- Autistic individuals might express their feelings differently, and they may have difficulty understanding others' emotions.



MYTH #3: AUTISM IS CAUSED BY PARENTING STYLE

FACT:

- Autism is a result of differences in brain development, not a result of parenting style.
- Though there is still much to learn about the factors that contribute to autism, research suggests that a combination of genetic and environmental factors have a role.



MYTH #4: AUTISM SHOULD BE CURED

FACT:

- Autism is not a disease. Even the term “disorder” is increasingly recognized as an inaccurate way to think about autism.
- Many autistic individuals view autism as an integral and valued part of their identity that comes with many strengths.



MYTH #5: AUTISTIC PEOPLE DON'T LEAD FULFILLING, PURPOSEFUL LIVES

FACT:

- With support and understanding, autistic individuals can lead fulfilling, purposeful lives.
- They can thrive in school, form healthy relationships, and contribute significantly to their communities.
- Autism does not limit a person's potential for a fulfilling life.



MYTH #6: AUTISM OCCURS MAINLY IN MALES

FACT:

- While research indicates that autism is diagnosed more frequently in males, females can and do have autism.
- Autism may present differently in females, leading to underdiagnosis, misdiagnosis, or a diagnosis that is received much later in life. This concept is commonly referred to as “the girl gap”.



MYTH #7: ALL AUTISTIC PEOPLE HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES

FACT:

- While some people may have co-occurring learning disabilities, many do not.
- It is important not to make assumptions about a child's or adult's cognitive abilities based on an autism diagnosis.
- Every person has unique strengths and challenges and should be understood and supported as an individual.



MYTH #8: AUTISTIC PEOPLE DON'T HAVE MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

FACT:

- Autistic people have higher rates of co-occurring mental health disorders. About 70% of autistic people have mental health conditions including anxiety disorders, depression, ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.
- Reasons why autistic people may be more likely to experience mental health disorders include:
 - ❑ Stigma and discrimination
 - ❑ Misdiagnosis
 - ❑ Lack of support
 - ❑ Difficulty interacting with the world



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CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH ASD

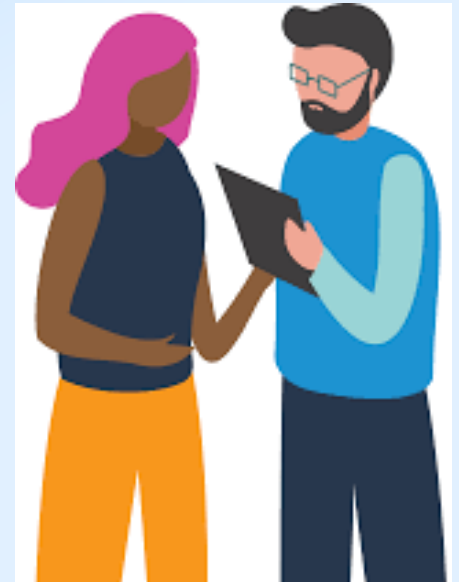
LEARN HOW TO COMMUNICATE

- For many autistic people, communication can be challenging.
- Some autistic people are non-verbal, so creative ways to communicate must be developed. Many do well with visual communication.
- Use clear, concise language. Check to see if what you said was understood. If not, explain it in a different way.



TIPS FOR TALKING TO AN ADULT WITH ASD

- Address the person as you would any other adult, not a child. Do not assume the person has limited cognitive skills.
- Avoid using phrases that are demeaning or disrespectful such as using words like “honey” or “sweetie”.
- Say what you mean – be literal, clear, and concise. Avoid slang, nuance, and sarcasm as those forms of communication may be confusing and not easily understood by someone with autism.
- Take time to listen and allow time for a response.
- Don't speak as if the person is not in the room when in a group setting.




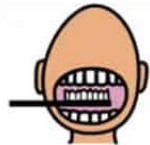










BE PATIENT

- Patience is vital. Since social and communication skills are underdeveloped, it can be hard to get through to them.
- Take time to listen. If something that was said is unclear, ask questions to clarify.



CREATE A SCHEDULE AND STICK TO IT

- Those with autism benefit and thrive from a structured schedule. Any deviation to the schedule could throw them off.
- A schedule, or routine, provides a sense of stability and reassurance.
- If there is going to be a change in the schedule, inform the person beforehand so that a plan for coping with the change can be developed.

Daily Schedule			
 bathroom	 brush teeth	 snack	 lunch
 nap time	 relax	 dinner	 jobs
 bath	 get dressed	 put on pyjamas	 bed time

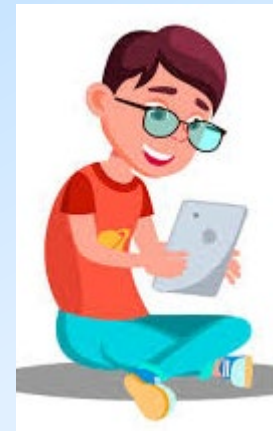
PAY ATTENTION TO SENSORY NEEDS

- Many autistic people are over- or under-sensitive to specific sounds, tastes, smells or sights, which can cause them mental distress and physical discomfort.
- Knowing and understanding someone's sensory needs and then making efforts to avoid things that could add to discomfort can help autistic people feel at ease.
- Sensory-friendly clothing is made of soft fabrics, has no tags, has a stretchy waistband, and limited seams.

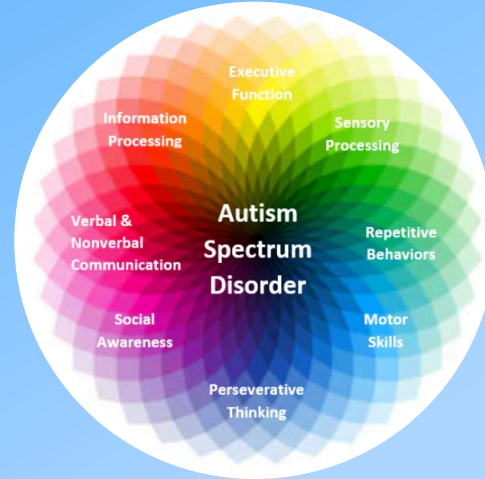


SCHEDULE TIME FOR RELAXATION

- In between school or work, chores, and therapy, an autistic person can easily get swamped.
- It helps to schedule time to unwind and relax.
- Find out what the person enjoys doing for relaxation so this can be offered.



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



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