



# AUTISM

**Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects how people interact with other people and communicate. ASD is related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. ASD also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behaviour and a wide range of symptoms of severity.**

**Autism begins in early childhood and eventually causes problems functioning in society – socially, in school and at work, for example. Often children show symptoms of autism within the first year. A small number of children appear to develop normally in the first year, and then go through a period of regression between 18 and 24 months of age when they develop autism symptoms.**

People with autism have trouble talking with and relating to other people. They also have unusual behaviours.

Autism starts in childhood and is usually noticeable before age 2. Children with autism typically have unusual, repetitive behaviours, have limited interests, and follow rigid routines. Children with mild symptoms may not be diagnosed until they're school-age.

Autism is different from low intelligence (intellectual disability) and isn't caused by vaccines (shots) or bad parenting.

## What are the symptoms of autism?

Children with autism have many different symptoms, and the severity of symptoms varies. However, the different symptoms always involve two things:

- Trouble communicating and interacting with people.
- Unusual, repetitive behaviours, interests, or activities.

These symptoms begin at a young age, often when your child is just a baby. However, you and your doctor may recognise the symptoms only when you look back.





### **In babies, trouble communicating includes:**

- Not cuddling
- Not making eye contact

### **In younger children, trouble communicating and interacting includes:**

- Being slow to start talking or never learning to talk.
- Avoiding eye contact when talking to someone.
- Repeating words other people have said.
- Talking with a strange rhythm and pitch.
- Not being able to tell from a person's facial expression or body language if the person is happy, angry, or sad.
- Not sharing their thoughts and feelings with others.
- Not interested in having friends.
- Choosing to play alone.



## Behavioural and motor symptoms include:

- Becoming very upset with any change, such as new food, toys, and clothing.
- Being extremely bothered by certain tastes, smells, or textures.
- Rocking, hand flapping, or spinning.
- Head banging or biting themselves.
- Repeating certain actions, such as watching the same movie over and over or eating the same food at every meal.
- Is unusually sensitive to light, sound or touch, yet may be indifferent to pain or temperature.
- Doesn't engage in imitative or make-believe play.
- Unusual interests, such as being very interested in vacuum cleaners or ceiling fans.

Many people with autism have intellectual disability and learning disorders. Usually, scores are lower on verbal tests than other areas.

## How can doctors tell if my child has autism?

Doctors will observe your child in a playroom and ask you and your child's teachers questions. They'll usually send your child to a psychologist for other tests.

Doctors will also do blood or genetics tests to see if a different problem is causing your child's symptoms, such as a genetic disorder (inherited medical problem).



## How is autism treated?

Symptoms are usually lifelong. People with autism with lower intelligence scores are likely to need more support in their adult lives. The mainstay of treatment includes:

- Behavioural therapy to develop social skills.
- Educational and family therapy.
- Special education at school.
- Sometimes medicine, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) or other medicine that may help children stop injuring themselves.
- Some families try special diets or alternative therapies but there is no scientific evidence that these are helpful for children with autism. Talk to your doctor about any therapies you're considering.

Source: [www.msmanuals.com](http://www.msmanuals.com)