



AUTISM



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Autism is a disorder that involves the way a child develops. It is usually discovered by the time a child is aged 2 and a half years, but could be later. Parents may notice that an infant or child is not behaving, talking, playing, or learning new skills as expected for their age group. Aspergers syndrome is like autism, but without the disabilities.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Does not talk or may talk using nonsense words. May use a sing-song voice and repeat what they hear. Unable to carry on a conversation.
- Does not respond to name and avoids eye contact.
- Is overactive. Wants to play alone.
- Repeats the same movements over and over such as rocking and flapping or twisting hands.
- Has special routines and does not like change.
- Does not want to be touched, such as being cuddled.
- May injure self by head-banging or biting.
- Is bothered by noises.
- Overly interested in lights or moving objects.

CAUSES

- Unknown. Research continues in hopes of finding the cause. It is known that parents do not cause autism.
- There is no scientific proof to link childhood immunizations to autism.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Unknown. It does affect boys more than girls.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

None known. Autism cannot currently be detected at birth or through any prenatal tests.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- The future is unknown for most autistic children. A child may be mentally retarded, have normal intelligence, or even have a genius-like ability. As they get older, their symptoms may improve, stay about the same, or worsen. Some children will need supervision for life. Some may be able to live independently.
- There is no cure for autism. Treatments can help with many of the symptoms.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Parents of an autistic child have an increased risk of having another child with the disorder.

- Stress for the family raising an autistic child.
- Autistic children are at a higher risk for seizures.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis is difficult, as the signs and symptoms may appear to be caused by another disorder or problem. There is no specific test for autism. Your health care provider (usually a mental health professional) will perform an examination of your child and ask you about your child's behavior and other symptoms you may have observed. Tests for speech and other skills may be done to see how your child is developing in comparison to normal levels for their age group.
- Treatment for autism should be started as soon as a child is diagnosed. Speech and behavior therapy and social skills training will help children with autism.
- The treatment plan for each child will depend on how mild or severe its symptoms are. Some children may be able to attend regular public schools, while others may require a special classroom.
- The treatment steps take time and patience. Different treatment methods may need to be tried for a child.
- Parents should join an autism family support group.
- Counseling may help some parents cope with the stress involved with raising an autistic child.
- New treatments for autism are being studied and may be recommended for your child in the future. There are certain treatments that parents or others have tried and found to work for one or a few children. These treatments may or may not work for other autistic children. Always talk to your child's health care provider before you try any new type of treatment.
- To learn more, contact: Autism Society of America, 7910 Woodmount Ave., Suite 300, Bethesda, MD 20814-3015; (800) 328-8476; www.autism-society.org.

MEDICATIONS

Medicine is usually not needed for this disorder. A drug may be prescribed to help control symptoms that could be a danger to your child, such as self-injury.

ACTIVITY

Help your child to stay as physically active as possible.

DIET

Special diets will not improve the symptoms of autism.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- Your child is not developing as expected for their age.
- After diagnosis, your child develops new symptoms or other symptoms worsen, despite treatment.

