

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder that affects a person's communication and behavior. It is known as a "spectrum" disorder because there is a wide spectrum of severity and symptoms that an individual can experience.

Signs & Symptoms

Although autism can be diagnosed at any age, it is said to be a "developmental disorder," because symptoms generally appear in the first two years of a child's life. A child with autism might experience:

- Significant delays in developmental milestones
- Difficulty with back and forth communication
- Frustration with slight changes in their routine
- Lasting and profound interest in a topic
- Trouble making and keeping eye contact
- Being slow to respond or not respond at all to someone trying to get their attention

Causes & Risk Factors

While we don't know the exact causes of autism, research suggests that genes can act together with influences from the environment to affect development that can lead to autism. Some risk factors include:

- Having a sibling who is autistic
- Having older parents
- Having certain genetic conditions
- Very low birth weight

Diagnosis & Treatment

Diagnosing young children with autism is usually a two-step process that consists of a general developmental screening, which happens during a well child checkup, followed by additional evaluations from developmental pediatricians or a child psychiatrist. Diagnosing older children or adolescents usually occurs when parents and teachers recognize symptoms. Treatment for autism should begin as soon as possible after diagnosis. Treatment plans can include a combination of medication and behavioral, psychological and educational therapy. Early treatment is important, as proper care can help children learn new skills and make the most of their strengths. If you have a child with autism, New Vista can help connect you with resources and supports in your community.

Source – National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>