

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

## FACT SHEET

### What is autism spectrum disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. Scientists do not know yet exactly what causes these differences for most people with ASD. However, some people with ASD have a known difference, such as a genetic condition. There are multiple causes of ASD, although most are not yet known.

There is usually nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but they may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. Some people with ASD need a lot of help in their daily lives; others need less.

A diagnosis of ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separately: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome. These conditions are now all called autism spectrum disorder.

### What are some of the signs of ASD?

People with ASD often have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASD also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things. Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and last throughout a person's life.

#### Children or adults with ASD might:

- not point at objects to show interest (for example, not point at an airplane flying over)
- not look at objects when another person points at them
- have trouble relating to others or not have an interest in other people at all
- avoid eye contact and want to be alone

- have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- prefer not to be held or cuddled, or might cuddle only when they want to
- appear to be unaware when people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- be very interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them
- repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language
- have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- not play "pretend" games (for example, not pretend to "feed" a doll)
- repeat actions over and over again
- have trouble adapting when a routine changes
- have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound
- lose skills they once had (for example, stop saying words they were using)

### What can I do if I think my child has ASD?

Talk with your child's doctor or nurse. If you or your doctor thinks there could be a problem, ask for a referral to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist. At the same time, contact your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or local public school (for children 3 and older), even if your child does not go to that school. To find out whom to speak to in your area, contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities by logging onto [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org). In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has links on its Autism Spectrum Disorder Web page to information for families (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/links.html>).

Don't wait. Acting early can make a real difference!

[www.cdc.gov/actearly](http://www.cdc.gov/actearly)

1-800-CDC-INFO



Learn the Signs. Act Early.