

Autism *At a Glance*



What is autism?

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that includes delays in social communication (such as limited eye contact or difficulty with conversation), restricted interests, repetitive behaviors, sensory sensitivities, and unique play or learning styles. Autism is diagnosed in 3.2% of children by age 8 years in the U.S.

How is autism diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on medical and developmental history, behavioral observations in two different settings (home and school/daycare) and standardized assessments.

Who diagnoses autism?

Autism can be diagnosed by developmental-behavioral pediatricians, child psychologists, child psychiatrists, neurologists, and specialized early-intervention evaluators.



Onset & Causes

Signs typically appear between 12 and 24 months of age, though some children show differences earlier or later. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all children be screened for autism at their 18 and 24-month well-child checkups. There is no single reason why children and adults are autistic. Research thus far supports genetic and environmental influences. There is no causal link between vaccines or use of acetaminophen (Tylenol and similar products) and autism.

Early intervention can make a difference.



Treatment

Interventions may include primary and supportive approaches such as behavioral therapies (ABA and developmental approaches, e.g., Floortime, social-pragmatic models), speech-language therapy (verbal, nonverbal, and alternative communication [AAC]), occupational therapy (daily living skills, sensory processing, and fine motor skills), physical therapy (improving balance, coordination, strength, and motor development), social skills training, parent-mediated interventions, educational supports, mental health therapies (counseling or cognitive-behavioral therapy [CBT], especially for anxiety or emotional regulation), and creative or complementary therapies (art, music, or animal-assisted therapy).

What specialties treat autism?

Autism can be treated by developmental-behavioral pediatricians, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, behavior specialists, and physical, art, and music therapists.

Questions to ask your doctor:

- How do we access treatment and school services?
- Are there co-occurring conditions to evaluate?

Diet & Supplements

Nutrition concerns may be more common in autistic children. Families should consult their doctor when considering dietary changes or supplements.

Scan QR codes to explore resources.

Autism Speaks



HealthyChildren.org

