

What is Autism

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Today, 1 in 150 individuals is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and is four times more likely to strike boys than girls. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines.

Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe.

Autism spectrum disorders can usually be reliably diagnosed by age 3, although new research is pushing back the age of diagnosis to as early as 6 months. Parents are usually the first to notice unusual behaviors in their child or their child's failure to reach appropriate developmental milestones. Some parents describe a child that seemed different from birth, while others describe a child who was developing normally and then lost skills. Pediatricians may initially dismiss signs of autism, thinking a child will "catch up," and may advise parents to "wait and see." New research shows that when parents suspect something is wrong with their child, they are usually correct. If you have concerns about your child's development, don't wait: speak to your pediatrician about getting your child screened for autism.