



Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability; signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person's ability to communicate, and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes. Some of the behaviors associated with autism include delayed learning of language; difficulty making eye contact or holding a conversation; difficulty reasoning and planning; poor motor skills and sensory sensitivities. A person on the spectrum might follow many of these behaviors, or just a few. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is applied based on analysis of all behaviors and their severity.

I. SYMPTOMS OF AUTISM-

The characteristic behaviors of autism spectrum disorder may be apparent in infancy (18 to 24 months), but they usually become clearer during early childhood (24 months to 6 years).

As part of a well-baby or well-child visit, your child's doctor should perform a "developmental screening," asking specific questions about your baby's progress. The [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#) (NICHD) lists five behaviors that warrant further evaluation:

- Does not babble or coo by 12 months
- Does not gesture (point, wave, grasp) by 12 months
- Does not say single words by 16 months
- Does not say two-word phrases on his or her own by 24 months
- Has any loss of any language or social skill at any age

Any of these five "red flags" does not mean your child has autism. But **because the disorder's symptoms vary so widely, a child showing these behaviors should be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team.** This team might include a neurologist, psychologist, developmental pediatrician, speech/language therapist, learning consultant or other professionals who are knowledgeable about autism.

II. DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM-

When parents or support providers become concerned that their child is not following a typical developmental course, they turn to experts, including psychologists, educators and medical professionals, for a diagnosis. **A brief observation in a single setting cannot present a true picture of someone's abilities and behaviors.** The person's developmental history and input from parents, caregivers and/or teachers are important components of an accurate diagnosis.

III. CAUSES-

There is no known single cause for autism spectrum disorder, but it is generally accepted that it is caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Brain scans show differences in the shape and structure of the brain in children with autism compared to in neurotypical children. Researchers do not know the exact cause of autism but are investigating a number of theories, including the links among heredity, genetics and medical problems.

FACTS & STATISTICS REGARDING AUTISM

About 1 percent of the world population has autism spectrum disorder.

Prevalence in the United States is estimated at 1 in 68 births.

More than 3.5 million Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder.

Prevalence of autism in U.S. children increased by 119.4 percent from 2000 to 2010. Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability.

Autism services cost U.S. citizens \$236-262 billion annually.

A majority of costs in the U.S. are in adult services – \$175-196 billion, compared to \$61-66 billion for children.

The U.S. cost of autism over the lifespan is about \$2.4 million for a person with an intellectual disability, or \$1.4 million for a person without intellectual disability.

35 percent of young adults (ages 19-23) with autism have not had a job or received postgraduate education after leaving high school.

It costs more than \$8,600 extra per year to educate a student with autism. (The average cost of educating a student is about \$12,000.

Resource: www.autism-society.org