



Autism Spectrum Disorders

What Everyone Needs to Know

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are ...

... a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges.

- People with ASD process information differently than other people.
- The term “spectrum” means that these disorders affect each person differently. Impacts can range from very mild to severe, and the ability of individuals with ASD to think and learn can vary significantly.

... an urgent public health concern.

- Incidence of ASD in the United States has increased tremendously.
- The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that an average of one in every 110 children in the United States has an ASD – that’s higher than the rate of childhood cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined.
- ASD typically occur before the age of three. To date there is no known cure for ASD, although early intervention has been shown to greatly improve a child’s development.
- Some ASD can be diagnosed as early as 18 months of age, however, many children do not receive a diagnosis until much older. Delaying diagnosis means a child may miss the opportunity to get help early.
- Many people with an ASD require lifelong supports and services to develop the skills they need to live successful, happy lives.
- Recent studies have estimated that the lifetime cost to care for one individual with an ASD is \$3.2 million. Average medical expenditures for individuals with ASD have been found to be 4.1 to 6.2 percent higher than that of individuals without an ASD.
- Caring for a family member diagnosed with an ASD can be stressful for parents, siblings and caregivers.

ASD Signs and Symptoms

There is no medical test to detect ASD. A qualified professional evaluates a person’s behavior and development to make a diagnosis. A person with an ASD might have a combination of the following symptoms.

- Not respond to their name by 12 months
- Not point at objects to show interest by 14 months
- Not play “pretend” games (e.g., pretend to feed a doll) by 18 months
- Have delayed speech and language skills

- Lose skills they once had (e.g., stop saying words they were using)
- Repeat words or phrases over and over (echolalia)
- Give unrelated answers to questions
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them, but respond to other sounds
- Have difficulty understanding, initiating and/or maintaining conversations
- Have trouble expressing their needs using typical words or motions
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Have trouble understanding others' feelings
- Get upset by minor changes in routine
- Become overly focused on very narrow interests, such as a specific topic or object
- Flap their hands, rock their body, or spin in circles
- Have unusual reactions to the way things sound, smell, taste, look or feel
- Repeat actions over and over again

What can you do?

If someone you know shows signs of ASD, don't wait. There are things you can do:

- If it's your own child, talk with your child's doctor. Ask for a referral to a developmental pediatrician, a child neurologist, or a child psychologist or psychiatrist who can evaluate your child.
- If it is someone else's child, share the signs of ASD with the child's caregivers and encourage them to have the child evaluated.
- If the child is under age three, contact the New York State Early Intervention Program and request an evaluation: (518) 473-7016.
- If the child is between ages 3-21, contact your local public school district and request an evaluation.

For More Information

For information about ASD and New York State supports and services for individuals of any age with ASD, visit New York State's Initiative for Adults and Children on the Autism Spectrum website (www.nyacts.com).

For help finding out who to speak to in your local area, contact the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities at 1-800-695-0285 or www.nichcy.org.

For more information about child development and the warning signs of ASD, access the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Detect Autism Tools" at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/DetectAutismTools/> and its "Learn the Signs. Act Early" campaign at 1-800-CDC-INFO or www.cdc.gov/actearly.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are increasing. Acting early can make a real difference.

Sources: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov
Easter Seals' "Living with Autism" Study, 2008
Michael L. Ganzer, "The Lifetime Distribution of the Incremental Societal Costs of Autism," *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 2007, 161 (4):343-349.