

Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a lifelong developmental condition that affects, among other things, the way an individual relates to his or her environment and their interaction with other people.

The word 'spectrum' describes the range of difficulties that people on the autism spectrum may experience and the degree to which they may be affected. Some people may be able to live relatively normal lives, while others may have an accompanying learning challenges and require continued specialist support.

- The main areas of difficulty are in social communication, social interaction and restricted or repetitive behaviours and interests.

People on the autism spectrum may also have:

- unusual sensory interests such as sniffing objects or staring intently at moving objects
- sensory sensitivities including avoiding everyday sounds and textures such as hair dryers, vacuum cleaners and sand
- intellectual impairment or learning difficulties

An estimated one in 100 people has autism; that's almost 230,000 Australians. Autism affects almost four times as many boys than girls.

What causes Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism has no single, known cause. Given the complexity of the condition, and the fact that symptoms and severity vary, there are probably many causes. Both genetics and environment may play a role. There is no evidence that autism is caused by a child's upbringing or social circumstances.

Is there a cure for autism?

There is no known cure for autism. However, an early diagnosis and targeted intervention can assist in reducing the impact of a child's autism on their functioning.

Autism and vaccines

No proven link between vaccines and autism:

One of the greatest controversies in autism is centered on whether a link exists between autism and certain childhood vaccines, particularly the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. Despite extensive research, no reliable study has shown a link between autism and the MMR vaccine

Genetics

Several genes appear to be involved in autism. Some may make a child more susceptible to the condition. Others affect brain development or the way that brain cells communicate.

Still others may determine the severity of symptoms. Each problem in genes may account for a small number of cases, but taken together, the influence of genes is likely substantial. Some genetic problems seem to be inherited, while others happen spontaneously.

Environmental factors

Researchers are currently exploring whether such factors as viral infections, complications during pregnancy and air pollutants play a role in triggering autism.

People with ongoing medical conditions or health concerns often have phobias. There is a high incidence of people developing phobias after traumatic brain injuries. Substance abuse and depression are also connected to phobias.

Does my child have Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability. The main areas of difficulty for people with an autism are to do with social interaction and communication. They also often have repetitive and restricted interests, activities and behaviours, and may be over- or under-sensitive to sounds, touch, tastes, smells or light. Autism may also be accompanied by an intellectual disability.

The autism spectrum reflects the wide degree to which people can be affected – from experiencing social difficulties to requiring a lifetime of specialised support. It is a lifelong disability.

Social interaction

People with an autism have difficulty forming and maintaining relationships. This is because they do not instinctively respond to non-verbal forms of communication, such as facial expressions, physical gestures and eye contact.

They are often unable to understand and express their needs just as they are unable to interpret and understand the needs of others. This impairs their ability to share interests and activities with other people.

Communication

Because people on the spectrum have impaired communication skills, they may find it difficult to meet people and develop friendships. They often seem to exist in their own world – ‘auto’ means ‘self’ – and may be isolated.

They may also experience delayed speech development and have difficulty understanding many of the things that people say to them. This affects their ability to initiate and sustain conversations. They don’t understand sarcasm and will take things literally. People with autism are often brutally honest as they don’t ‘filter’ what they say before they speak.

They may also repeat phrases they have heard on television or words that people have said to them some time before (known as echolalia). Even people with an autism who have well developed language skills find it difficult to express their needs and interpret the needs of others, and may use language in a random way with no regard for meaning or context.

Sensitivity

People on the autism spectrum may also be hyper sensitive to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours. For someone with hyper-sensitivity, sounds that others might not notice can be overwhelming or physically painful for someone on the spectrum and they may need to wear ear defenders to block out the noise. Conversely people on the spectrum may be hypo (less) sensitive and/or indulge in self-stimulatory behaviours, like hand flapping, spinning or head-banging.

What can I do?

For the parent, carer or partner of a person on the spectrum, choosing one of the many forms of treatment available to meet the person’s individual needs can be difficult.

Of the types of treatment that are available to people, many are reputable and informed approaches that are beneficial to both the individual and their family. But in other instances, the claims made in support of treatments and their potential for success are unsustainable and misleading.

Treatments that offer a ‘cure’ or ‘recovery’ should be avoided because there is no evidence to support either claim. Even more modest claims of success should be scrutinised thoroughly to ensure that the proposed outcomes are evidence informed.

The broad range of impairments and the varying degrees to which people are affected means that one approach will not be suitable to every individual. An evidence informed approach that encourages activities that support the individual’s strengths and interests are proven to be the most credible forms of treatment.

WALK DIFFERENT.

PSYCHOLOGY DONE DIFFERENT

PO BOX 394
Figtree NSW 2525
(02) 4244 7054
(02) 8014 7684
admin@walkdifferent.com.au

For further information on treatments, approaches and strategies, please click on the following links:

- [choosing an approach](#)
- [positive behaviour support](#)
- [visual supports](#)
- [social stories](#)
- [establishing routines](#)
- [using play](#)
- [how siblings can help](#)
- [taking care of the parent and carer](#)

TAKE YOUR FIRST STEP & BOOK YOUR FIRST SESSION USING OUR SPECIAL OFFER OF ONLY

\$99

www.walkdifferent.com.au / (02) 4244 7054

This information was sourced from www.autismspectrum.org.au

walkdifferent.com.au