

## **Autism Fact Sheet**

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### **What is autism?**

Autism is a disorder that is characterized by varying degrees of impaired communication and social interactions, and also by repetitive behaviors. Autism is one of a group of developmental disabilities called autism spectrum disorders (ASD) that affect a person's ability to understand verbal and nonverbal communication and learn appropriate ways of relating to other people and situations. No two people with ASD are the same in that it can affect a person's level of functioning from mild to severe. Additionally, ASD often occurs in combination with other disabilities (Autism Speaks, 2009; Autism Society of North Carolina, 2009; National Institute of Mental Health, 2009).

### **What are some signs of autism?**

A person with ASD might:

- Have delayed language (not babbling or using words)
- Have difficulty with pretend or imaginative games or show interest in social games (peek-a-boo)
- Not point at objects to show interest or look at objects when another person points to them
- Avoid eye contact and prefers to be alone
- Have difficulty understanding other's feelings or talking about their own feelings
- Have difficulty directing others' attention
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them but respond to other sound
- Be interested in people, but not know how to talk, play, or relate to them
- Laugh, cry, or show distress for no apparent reason
- Repeat actions over and over again
- Repeat or echo words or phrases said to them, or repeat words or phrases in place of normal language (echolalia)
- Have trouble adapting to changes in routine
- Have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sounds
- Be oversensitive or undersensitive to pain
- Lose skills that were once previously acquired (for instance, stop saying words they were once using)

(Autism Society of North Carolina, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007, 2009).

### **What causes Autism?**

Although it was first identified in 1943, the cause is yet to be found. However, a lot has been learned about the symptoms and course of these disorders. Scientists believe that both genes and environment play a role; a variety of possible environmental triggers are being studied. It is possible that ASD is caused by a combination of several factors and or genes (Autism Society of North Carolina, 2009).

### **Who is affected?**

ASD occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and are four times more likely to occur in boys than in girls. It is the second most common developmental disability following mental retardation, and it is estimated that 1 out of 110 children are born with some form of ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Autism Speaks, 2009). Furthermore, 67 children are diagnosed per day with autism being the fastest-growing developmental disability in the U.S. (Autism Speaks, 2009).

## How is Autism treated?

At this time, no cure has been found for ASD. However, with individualized treatment, education, and support, people with ASD can improved and develop skills that will allow them to live and participate in their community (Autism Society of North Carolina, 2009). It is very important to begin interventions as early as possible in order to help individuals with ASD reach their full potential. ASDs can often be detected as early as 18 months, so it is imperative that parents and physicians recognize and accurately diagnose ASD as early as possible (Autism Speaks, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007, 2009).

## What can I do if I think my child has an ASD?

Talk with your child's doctor. Ask for a referral to see a developmental pediatrician or other specialist. You can also call your local early intervention agency (for children under 3) or public school (for children 3 and older). To find out whom to speak to in your area, you can contact the National Information Center for Children and Youth Disabilities (NICHCY) by logging onto [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) or call 1-800-695-0285 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

## References

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## Helpful Websites and Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
Autism Speaks [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)  
Autism Alliance of Greater KC [www.autismalliancekc.org](http://www.autismalliancekc.org)  
National Institute of Mental Health [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

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