



X-Plain *Autism – Early Signs* **Reference Summary**

Introduction

Autism is a medical disorder that appears in early childhood. It affects a child's development by affecting his or her ability to communicate and interact with others. It is estimated that up to 1 out of 100 children in the United States have autism.

Autism ranges from mild communication or behavioral symptoms to severe autism. In severe cases, a child may completely lack the ability to communicate or interact with other people. There is no cure for autism. However, early treatment can help many children have a better quality of life.



This reference summary is for parents and caregivers of children. It helps them understand what autism is, what signs and symptoms to look for in children, and when to seek medical help.

What is Autism?

Autism is a disorder that appears in children usually before the age of 3. It affects how children grow up and develop in three ways:

1. Language or how they talk
2. Social skills or how they respond and initiate communication with others
3. Behavior or how they respond in certain situations

There are different types of autism, and the symptoms of autism vary a lot from child to child. That is why this disorder is referred to as autism spectrum disorder or ASD. Autism affects children of all races and nationalities.

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There is no current cure for autism. A child with ASD is expected to live with autism for the rest of his or her life. However, with early detection, there are many treatment options which can help a person with autism improve his or her quality of life.

Some adults with autism are able to work and live on their own. Others need a lot of help, especially those whose thought processes or intelligence has been affected and/or those who are unable to speak or communicate.

The quality of life a child with autism will have in his or her adolescence and adulthood depends on:

- how soon the autism was diagnosed
- its severity, and
- the intensity of personalized treatment the child receives.

With early and intensive treatment, most children improve their ability to relate to others, communicate, and help themselves as they grow older. This program will help you learn about signs of early childhood autism and when to seek the help of healthcare professionals.

Causes

The causes of autism are not well understood. In addition, autism is not a single disorder but a spectrum of many disorders. That is why scientists are confident there may be many causes for autism spectrum disorder.

Scientists are studying many theories about the genetic and environmental causes of autism so they can learn how to treat it better. Researchers have discovered a number of genes that appear to be involved in autism. Researchers are studying whether viral infections and air pollutants play a role in triggering autism.



Statistical research tells us that the likelihood of having an autistic child is higher:

- If there is a history of autism in the family
- If the child is a boy

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- If the father is older than 40
- If there is a history of certain genetic and neurological disorders in the family



Some theories have been suggested about the causes of autism, but these have not been proven. The following are some of the unproven theories about the causes of autism as of the date of publication:

- Changes in the digestive tract
- Diet of the child
- Poisoning by mercury
- Sensitivity to certain vaccines

Many studies have found that vaccines do not cause autism. There is not a proven link between any vaccine and autism.

Symptoms

Signs of autism can sometimes be noticeable in the first few months of life and other times they may not show up until a child is as old as 3 years.

Since autism is not one specific disorder, each child may have a different set of symptoms. But, there are some common signs that many children who are later diagnosed with ASD share. Not all children who have some of these signs will later be diagnosed with ASD.

There are many signs and symptoms that a parent should watch for that may indicate that a child may have ASD. Here are 10 early warning signs that parents can look for which may mean that a child is not developing normally.

1. Infants normally respond to familiar voices within their first few months of life and turn their attention to the familiar voice. If a child is not responsive to familiar voices most of the time, this may be a reason to be concerned. Sometimes an infant that is not responding correctly will ignore familiar voices and instead respond to other sounds around them.
2. Usually, around the age of 1, a child is able to join a person in looking at something of interest. For instance, if a person points to something, a child will look towards that item and become interested. Also, children who are developing

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normally will often bring items of interest to other's attention. Not having shared interest with other people may be a sign that something is wrong.



3. Infants usually mimic the people around them. Children who are developing normally will mimic facial expressions, hand movements and even body movements. Children with ASD rarely mimic.
4. Children with ASD may not respond to other people's emotions. When a child with ASD sees someone who is crying or upset, they may not respond at all. A child that is developing normally usually responds to this emotion in some way. For instance, they may try to comfort the person or become upset themselves.
5. Children with ASD rarely pretend play. A child with ASD may play with an object by touching it or moving it, but not interacting with it in an imaginative way. For instance, a child with ASD may take a toy plane and tinker with it in a meaningless way. A child who is developing normally might pretend that the plane is flying and interact with in an imaginative way.
6. A child may develop normally and then suddenly lose language or social skills. For instance, a child with ASD may suddenly no longer be able to form sentences or use certain words that they could before.
7. Children with ASD may have abnormal body movements. They may move around constantly and have difficulty being still. They may also engage in repetitive movements like rocking back and forth, clapping, or flapping their arms.
8. A child with ASD may have abnormal reactions to pain, light, sound or touch. A child with ASD may not have a normal reaction to pain and seem under sensitive to it. However, a loud noise may upset or even seem to cause pain to a child with ASD.



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9. A child with ASD may get very upset when their daily routine changes. Even very small changes may cause a child with ASD to become very upset. Children without ASD may not like changes to their routine but tend to adapt.



10. Children with ASD may have an extreme temperament. They may be very aggressive towards others or even themselves. They may also be overactive or even overly passive.

When to See a Doctor

There is no single medical test that tells if a child is autistic. That is why doctors rely on parents who are usually the first to suspect that there is a developmental problem.

Call your healthcare provider if you think that your child is not developing normally.

Signs that your child needs professional evaluation include:

- At 12 months, your child is not babbling yet
- At 12 months, your child does not use gestures (like waving or pointing)
- At 16 months, your child is not saying single words
- At 24 months, your child does not use two word phrases. If the only time a child uses two word phrases is when he or she is repeating phrases they have heard and using them without meaning, then they are not using unique two word phrases yet.
- Your child loses language or social skills at any age



Diagnosis

Autism can vary from mild to severe and may have a different set of symptoms for each person. Because of this, it can be difficult to diagnose. There is no specific autism test.

It is important to take your child to her or his doctor regularly to have her or his development checked. Although a specialist is usually needed for a diagnosis of autism, your child's pediatrician may be able to spot some early warning signs.



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To diagnosis a child with ASD, a team of different specialists may give a child a variety of different developmental tests including language, speech, and behavior tests. A full physical exam as well as blood tests and a variety of other tests may be done.

Many times the diagnosis of autism is not made until a child is two or three years old. It is important to get a child diagnosed early, because the earlier treatment begins, the better the child may respond.

Treatments

There is no cure for autism, but there are treatments and therapies. Treatment is based on the specific case. Treatment for one autistic child may be very different than treatment for another autistic child. Treatments are also constantly evolving and changing. Because of the wide variety of special needs that different autistic children have, treatment is most effective when it is tailored to each child.

Treatment may include a combination of:

- Behavioral therapies that help teach skills and reduce problematic behaviors
- Speech Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Medications to manage some of the symptoms
- Changes in diet



Conclusion

Autism is a disorder that appears in children usually before the age of 3. It affects how children talk, interact, and behave. There are different types of autism, and the symptoms of autism vary significantly from child to child.

It is important to learn about early signs of autism in order to seek professional help. Seek professional help if you think your child is not developing normally. Things to watch for include:

- At 12 months your child is not babbling yet
- At 12 months your child does not use gestures (like waving or pointing)
- At 16 months, your child is not saying single words



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- At 24 months, your child does not use non mimicked two word phrases
- Your child loses language or social skills at any age

Though there is no current cure for autism, there are many treatment options which aim at helping autistic children have a better quality of life. The earlier the treatments, the more successful they are likely to be. Ask your doctor if you have any concerns about the healthy development of your child.

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