



5 Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Autism?

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a difference in the way a person's brain works. It affects how someone learns, socializes, communicates, reacts to changes, and experiences the world around them. ASD may lead to people interacting in ways that feel different from what you might expect, but different does not mean less. Like all people, individuals with ASD are first individuals. Some people are happy to spend more time alone, while others are very sociable and outgoing. Some individuals with ASD speak to communicate, while others use gestures/sign language, visuals, or behavior to convey their thoughts. A person with ASD tends to prefer structure and routine, repeat actions, or have strong interests in certain topics. Sometimes they can be more or less sensitive to sounds, lights, touch, or other things in the environment. Some move differently and find joy or relaxation in movements like flapping their hands or walking on their tiptoes. All people with ASD experience love, happiness, loneliness, sadness, pain, and every other emotion, but they may have a unique way of showing how they are feeling. .



2. What Causes Autism?

ASD is caused by a complex combination of genetic and environmental factors. This is why ASD tends to run in families, but not with a predictable pattern. Many genes controlling the ways that brain cells connect, communicate, and function may be different in people with ASD. When scientists talk about autism having "environmental" causes, they mean factors besides genetics that influence the developing brain, like being born prematurely, having older parents, and having some medication, illness, or other exposures during pregnancy. It is important to understand that parents do not cause autism and autism is not a curse from God. Vaccines also do not cause autism. Dozens of studies have shown that there is no relationship between autism and vaccine type or vaccine schedule. Developmental differences are often diagnosed around 18 to 24 months old. This timing happens to line up with when some vaccines are given. This does not mean that vaccines cause developmental differences or delays.



3. Why is Autism Becoming More Common?

Autism is being diagnosed more often now for several reasons. The definition of autism became much broader over the years, as we learned more about autism. While there are still major barriers, people in underserved groups are more likely to be able to access autism evaluation and be counted as having autism. Parents and professionals are looking for autism in populations where we previously had low concern, like girls and women. Professionals are recognizing that some kids with intellectual disability or a medical/genetic disorder also have autism and need autism services. More premature babies are surviving, and adults are older when they have babies; both increase the risk of autism. Professionals are recognizing that some kids we used to just call "different" actually have autism, and would benefit from supports.



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4. Can Autism Be Cured?



Autism cannot be cured. It is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder that affects people for their entire lives. Autism is not a disease, but a difference in the way the brain processes the world. Even though autism cannot be cured or reversed, a person with autism can make progress. There is no one treatment for autism. Treatment is individualized to the person with autism and their cognitive, sensory, communication, and behavioral needs.



5. What Are Some Common Signs of Autism?

The common signs of autism fall into five categories: social communication challenges, repetitive behaviors and interests, sensory differences, language and movement delays, and unusual mood or reactions. These can look like:

- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversations or understanding social “rules” (e.g., such as the distance you stand from another person or not interrupting).
- Avoiding eye contact or having difficulty understanding body language
- Challenges making friends
- Appearing not to understand the feelings of others
- Repetitive movements such as hand-flapping, rocking, or spinning
- A narrow and intense focus on certain topics or activities
- A strong need for routine and difficulty with change
- Playing with toys in repetitive ways rather than for pretend play or the intended purpose of the toy
- Being overly or under sensitive to common sounds, lights, smells or textures.
- Delays in language skills (e.g., no response to name, not following directions, not speaking or using repetitive words/phrases, speaking with an unusual tone)
- A delayed onset of movement skills or other developmental delays
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- Experiencing unusual levels of anxiety or nervousness
- Having a lack of fear or showing more fear, anxiety, or worry than expected.

You do not need to have all the answers to help your child grow and thrive. With support, patience, and the right strategies, meaningful progress happens one step at a time.