Autism

Also called: autism spectrum disorder

A serious developmental disorder that impairs the ability to communicate and interact.

**Common**

More than 200,000 US cases per year

- Treatment can help, but this condition can't be cured
- Chronic: can last for years or be lifelong
- Requires a medical diagnosis
- Lab tests or imaging rarely required

Autism spectrum disorder impacts the nervous system.

The range and severity of symptoms can vary widely. Common symptoms include difficulty with communication, difficulty with social interactions, obsessive interests, and repetitive behaviors.

Early recognition, as well as behavioral, educational, and family therapies may reduce symptoms and support development and learning.

**Ages affected**

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<thead>
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<th>Age Range</th>
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<td>0-2</td>
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<td>3-5</td>
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<td>6-13</td>
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<td>19-40</td>
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<td>41-60</td>
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<td>60+</td>
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**Genders affected**

- Males
- Females

**Symptoms**

Requiring a medical diagnosis

The range and severity of symptoms can vary widely. Common symptoms include difficulty with communication, difficulty with social interactions, obsessive interests, and repetitive behaviors.
People may experience:

Behavioral: inappropriate social interaction, poor eye contact, compulsive behavior, impulsivity, repetitive movements, self-harm, or persistent repetition of words or actions

Developmental: learning disability or speech delay in a child

Cognitive: intense interest in a limited number of things or problem paying attention

Psychological: unaware of others’ emotions or depression

Also common: anxiety, change in voice, sensitivity to sound, or tic

Treatments

Treatment consists of therapy

Early recognition, as well as behavioral, educational, and family therapies may reduce symptoms and support development and learning.

Therapies

Anger management: Practicing mindfulness, coping mechanisms, and trigger avoidance to minimize destructive emotional outbursts.

Family therapy: Psychological counseling that helps families resolve conflicts and communicate more effectively.

Applied behavior analysis: A teaching method that helps autistic children learn socially significant skills by encouraging positive behavior.

Behavior therapy: A therapy focused on modifying harmful behaviors associated with psychological distress.

Sensory processing: The way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses.

Animal-Assisted therapy: Using animals to enhance the physical, emotional, and social well-being of humans.

Telepractice: Using high-speed Internet, webcams, Skype, and other communication technologies to provide speech therapy from a distant location.

Medications

Antipsychotic: Reduces or improves the symptoms of certain psychiatric conditions.

- Risperidone (Risperdal, Risperdal Consta, and Risperdal M-TAB)
- Quetiapine (Seroquel and Seroquel XR)

Specialists

Speech therapist: Specializes in voice rehabilitation.

Occupational therapist: Improves daily living and work skills of patients.

Clinical psychologist: Treats mental disorders primarily with talk therapy.

Neurologist: Treats nervous system disorders.

Psychiatrist: Treats mental disorders primarily with medications.

Pediatrician: Provides medical care for infants, children, and teenagers.

Primary care provider (PCP): Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical
emergency, call your doctor or an emergency number immediately.

**Sources:** Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more