

CARE FOR U PLUS

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Autism

Autism, also called autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a complicated condition that includes problems with communication and behavior. It can involve a wide range of symptoms and skills. ASD can be a minor problem or a disability that needs full-time care in a special facility.

Autism is defined as a brain disorder that impairs the ability to communicate, form relationships, and respond to the environment. While some people with autism are very high functioning, others can have serious delays in language and development. An adult or child with autism can seem distant or unapproachable. Although symptoms can be different for each person with autism, the symptoms fall into categories of social and environmental interaction, communication, and behavior.

Symptoms of Autism:

Symptoms of autism usually appear before a child turns 3. Some people show signs from birth.

Common symptoms of autism include:

- A lack of eye contact
- A narrow range of interests or intense interest in certain topics
- Doing something over and over, like repeating words or phrases, rocking back and forth, or flipping a lever
- High sensitivity to sounds, touches, smells, or sights that seem ordinary to other people
- Not looking at or listening to other people
- Not looking at things when another person points at them
- Not wanting to be held or cuddled
- Problems understanding or using speech, gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice
- Talking in a sing-song, flat, or robotic voice
- Trouble adapting to changes in routine
- Some children with autism may also have seizures. These might not start until adolescence.



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Autism Spectrum Disorders:

These types were once thought to be separate conditions. Now, they fall under the range of autism spectrum disorders. They include:

- *Asperger's syndrome*. These children don't have a problem with language; in fact, they tend to score in the average or above-average range on intelligence tests. But they have social problems and a narrow scope of interests.
- *Autistic disorder*. This is what most people think of when they hear the word "autism." It refers to problems with social interactions, communication, and play in children younger than 3 years.
- *Childhood disintegrative disorder*. These children have typical development for at least 2 years and then lose some or most of their communication and social skills.
- *Pervasive developmental disorder (PDD or atypical autism)*. Your doctor might use this term if your child has some autistic behavior, like delays in social and communications skills, but doesn't fit into another category.

Remember that autistic children and adults do not understand others' thoughts, beliefs, or emotions. They do not understand social cues and cannot interpret facial expressions or other nonverbal forms of communication. Interventions help these patients adapt to daily activities and learn how to respond to others.

What to Report:

The autistic patient may be on medication or have additional medical issues. Be aware of problems with medication side effects such as diarrhea, nausea, headache, or other side effects. Remember that this patient may not be able to state exactly what is hurting or what is wrong. Assess for sleep patterns, bathroom patterns, eating habits, the ability to complete activities of daily living, and any changes in their patterns or behaviors. Any changes should be reported.

Be sure to report any new issues such as being aggressive toward a particular person or acting out at certain times of the day. Determine their anxiety level during activities or new interactions. Notice if there are any changes in their environment. If there are, discuss with the nurse and other caregivers how to help the patient adjust to anything new that may occur.

Conclusion:

Working with an Autistic child or adult can be challenging. However, remembering that someone with Autism tends to see parts of the big picture and not the big picture is helpful when determining how to communicate with them. Understanding that this person focuses on details and on visual communication can also be helpful. Setting up schedules and using pictures to give direction and information are examples of how to work with a person who has Autism. Remembering that the Autistic individual is intelligent but does not understand how to respond to the emotions or reactions of others can go a long way in providing care and helping the individual lead a productive life.