

# Autism

## Fact Sheet

### Autism is:

- A neurological disorder that affects the functioning of one's ability to communicate, understand language, play and relate to others.
- A "spectrum" disorder, or a group of disorders with a range of similar features.
- The third most common developmental disability following mental retardation and cerebral palsy.
- typically evident by age three, and significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction.

### What Causes Autism?

At this time, scientists do not know exactly what causes autism. In many families there appears to be a pattern of autism or related disabilities - which suggest there is a genetic basis to the disorder - however, at this time no gene has been linked to autism. Researchers are also examining possible neurological, infectious, metabolic, environmental and immunologic factors.

### How Common is Autism?

- Between two and six per 1,000 people have some form of autism/pervasive development disorder according
- to the National Institute on Mental Health.
- Autism affects 500,000 individuals in the United States alone.
- Autism is four times more common in boys than girls and it knows no racial, ethnic or social boundaries.
- Family income, lifestyle, and educational levels do not affect the chance of autism's occurrence.
- Every 21 minutes, a child is diagnosed with autism, and it now affects one in every 166 children.

### Common Signs of Autism:

Individuals with autism usually exhibit at least half of the traits listed below. These symptoms can range from mild to severe and vary in intensity from symptom to symptom. In addition, the behavior usually occurs across many different situations and is consistently inappropriate for their age.

- Resists change in routine
- Severe language deficits
- Prefers to be alone
- Little or no eye contact
- Spins objects
- Sustains odd play
- No real fear of dangers
- Difficulty in mixing with others
- Unresponsive to normal teaching methods
- May not want cuddling or act cuddly
- Inappropriately attached to objects
- Apparent over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to pain
- Difficulty in expressing needs
- Repeats words or phrases
- Tantrums
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Not responsive to verbal cues
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Laughs, cries or shows distress for reasons not apparent to others

### Is There a Cure?

In the medical sense, there is no cure for the differences in the brain, which result in autism. However, autism is treatable and individuals with autism can lead a fulfilling life.

### How is Autism Treated?

Autism and other pervasive development disorders is best treated through early intervention education, special education, family support and various medications.

For more information contact:

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