

National Autism Awareness Month

It wasn't all that long ago that many people had never heard of autism, let alone know someone who was affected. Today is a different story. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 150 babies currently born will be autistic. As many as 1.5 million Americans today are believed to have some form of autism. And numbers are on the rise.¹

Cases of autism are growing at 10-17 percent per year. At this rate, the prevalence of autism could reach 4 million Americans in the next decade.

What is autism?¹

Autism is a developmental disability that results from a neurological disorder. The brain does not function normally, impacting social interaction and communication skills in those that have it.

Autism typically appears during the first three years of life. Autism can affect anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, social boundaries, lifestyle or education. Although the incidence of autism is consistent around the globe, it is four times more prevalent in boys than girls.

Characteristics²

Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means it affects each individual differently and at varying degrees. People with autism may exhibit some of these traits:

- Insistence on sameness or resistance to change
- Difficulty with verbal expression and interacting with others
- Preference to being alone
- Repeating words or phrases instead of using responsive language
- Laughing, crying or showing distress for no apparent reason
- Throwing tantrums
- Resistance to positive physical touch
- Inability to make eye contact
- Obsessive attachment to objects

Causes³

Although there is no known single cause for autism, most experts agree it is caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Children with autism are born with it or the potential to develop it. It is not a mental illness nor is it caused by bad parenting or psychological factors in a child's development.

Diagnosis and outlook⁴

There are no medical tests for diagnosing autism. Observation of communication, behavior and development is used to make a diagnosis. But because many of the behaviors associated with autism are associated with other disorders, it's important to rule out other possible causes of symptoms. Early diagnosis of autism is extremely important. Early diagnosis can result in a dramatically better outcome for someone with autism.

Children with autism can learn and function normally. Although children do not "outgrow" autism, they do have the ability to improve with appropriate treatment and education.

Sources:

¹ "Defining Autism." Viewed online on *Autism Society of America* at: <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_what_is_home>.

² "Defining Autism." Viewed online on *Autism Society of America* at: <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_what_is_characteristics>.

³ "What Causes Autism?" Viewed online on *Autism Society of America* at: <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_what_is_causes>.

⁴ "Diagnosis and Consultation." Viewed online on *Autism Society of America* at: <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_what_is_diagnosis>.



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