

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



It is a condition associated with brain development that affects social interaction,

communication, and behavior. In addition, it includes limited and repeated patterns of behavior. People with ASD usually learn, communicate, interact, and behave differently. Symptoms are usually seen between the ages of 2 and 3. Symptoms vary depending on the severity of the disorder in each person.

Currently, the diagnoses included in ASD are Autism, Asperger's Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

### Signs and Symptoms

- It is difficult for them to relate to others.
- They avoid eye contact.
- They have a hard time understanding other people's feelings, including talking about their own feelings.
- They seem not to pay attention when spoken to but respond to other sounds.
- They prefer to be hugged only when they want to.
- They have difficulty expressing their needs with words or habitual movements.
- They don't look at objects when other people point to them.
- They repeat actions again.
- They have unusual reactions to smell, taste, appearance, touch, or sounds.
- They get upset in new situations or changes in their routine and environment.
- They repeat words or phrases, instead of using normal language.
- Gastrointestinal problems are present.

### Causes

So far, it has not been possible to establish a specific cause. It is mentioned that both genetic and environmental factors can play a role.

### Evaluation and Diagnosis

There is no specific test for diagnosis. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends screening for ASD for all children between the ages of 18 and 24 months at their routine medical visits.

Your doctor may require:

**1. Developmental evaluation:** it is a detailed and in-depth evaluation of the child's development. For this evaluation, a team of specialists, including a developmental pediatrician, neurologist, child psychologist, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, and others, evaluate the child. The results will highlight the strengths and challenges that the child faces. From there, the recommendation to carry out tests, therapies or certain specialized treatments may arise.

**2. Comprehensive diagnostic evaluation:** after performing specific evaluations, such as hearing, vision, genetic, neurological and psychological tests, the appropriate treatment will be identified.

### Treatments

Currently, there is no cure for ASD. The manifestation of this disorder varies from person to person. Therefore, different treatments can be used to reduce symptoms that interfere with the daily functioning and quality of life of those who suffer from it. Research shows that early treatment and intervention can improve development.

Treatment options include:

- **Behavioral approach:** focuses on identifying and understanding what happens before and after the manifestation of the behavior. In this therapy, desired behaviors are reinforced and unwanted ones are discouraged, in order to improve different skills. In addition, speech and language skills, physical and occupational skills are worked on.



- **Educational approach:** focuses on adapting learning to the needs and potential of the person with ASD.

- **Socio-relational approach:** focuses on improving social skills and creating emotional bonds between the person with ASD and their parents, caregivers, mentors and peers.

- **Pharmacological approach:** Prescription medications are used to manage some symptoms of the condition, such as attention deficit, energy levels, self-harm, anxiety, depression, seizures, sleep problems, and stomach or gastrointestinal ailments.

- **Psychological approach:** focuses on addressing the symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as those of behavior that may arise because of ASD.

- **Alternative approach:** different types of therapies are used as a complement to conventional treatments. These may include special diet, herbal supplements, chiropractic care, animal therapy, art therapy, mindfulness, or relaxation therapies. Before

starting any alternative treatment, the team of specialists caring for the person with ASD should be consulted.

### **Social and Emotional Aspect**

For recommendations, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after treatment, please visit your primary care physician or call the following hotlines:

#### **Medical Advice Line**

1-844-347-7801

**TTY/TDD** 1-844-347-7804

**APS Health:** 787-641-9133

#### **References:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/autism/es/signs-symptoms/signos-y-sintomas-de-los-trastornos-del-espectro-autista.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/autism/es/diagnosis/pruebas-para-la-deteccion-de-los-trastornos-del-espectro-autista.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352928>

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