

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Written by: Damita Lachman Sherwani

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder which contains a spectrum/range of similar condition that affects a person's social skills, non-verbal communication and possess a variation in challenges and strengths.

Autism Spectrum Disorder usually begins in early childhood. The earliest diagnosis was as early as 18 months. Furthermore, research shows that delays of developmental may be associated with autism.



What are the causes?

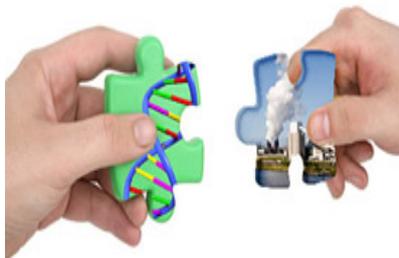
The answer to this question has been exposed not long ago. Rigorous evidence reveals that the main cause of a person's autism is mainly due to genetic cause. However, there are cases where there reveals a complex combination of genetic risk and environmental factors that impacts the early brain development.



Evidence of environmental risk are showed regarding events before and during birth.

Includes:

- Maternal illness during pregnancy
- Extreme prematurity
- Very low birth weight.
- Difficulties during birth
- Mothers exposed to high levels of pesticides and air pollution.



What are the signs and symptoms?

- ❖ Reduced eye contact
- ❖ Lack of response or indifference to caregivers
- ❖ Lose language skills that they have already acquired.
- ❖ Difficulty in learning
- ❖ Trouble communicating and applying what they know in their everyday life
- ❖ Difficulty in adjusting to social situations.
- ❖ Repetition in words or phrases
- ❖ Emotionless

Patterns of behaviour:

- ❖ Repetitive movements
- ❖ Perform activities that can cause self-harm
- ❖ Develops specific routines and becomes disturbed in adapting to change.
- ❖ Fixates on an object with abnormal intensity or focus.
- ❖ Has specific food preferences.

When to see the doctor?

- ❖ Does not show expressions by six months
- ❖ Does not mimic sounds by nine months
- ❖ Does not say single words by 16 months
- ❖ Does not say two word phrases by 24 months
- ❖ Loses language or social skills at any age



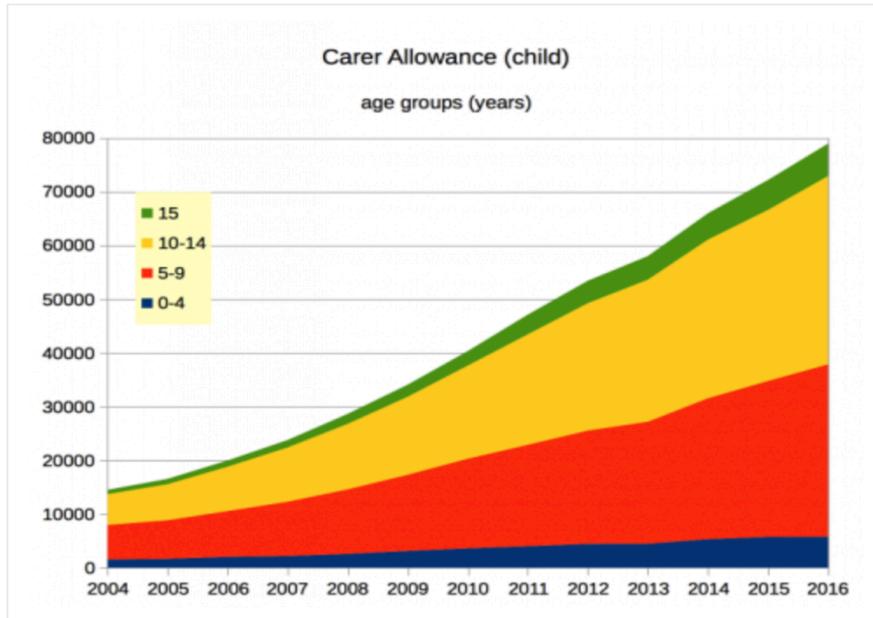
Risk Factors

- ❖ Child's sex: Boys are more likely to develop ASD than girls.
- ❖ Family history
- ❖ Other disorders such as fragile X syndrome, tuberous sclerosis and Rett syndrome.
- ❖ Extremely preterm babies
- ❖ Parent's age: Children born to older parents are more likely to gain ASD. However, there is less evidence supporting this.

Diagnosis Evaluation

- ❖ Speech and language evaluation
- ❖ Cognitive testing
- ❖ Adaptive functioning assessment
- ❖ Sensory-motor evaluation

Statistics in Australia



Autism diagnoses in Australia continues to grow in a substantial rate. In June 2016, there were 78,951 autistic children getting a carer allowance which showed an increase of 9.4% from 2015.

Treatments & Therapies

- ❖ Keep a detailed notebook to record conversations and meetings with health care providers and teachers.
- ❖ Record the doctor's reports and evaluations in a notebook
- ❖ Contacting autism advocacy groups to learn about their special programs.
- ❖ Develop intervention plans
- ❖ Find an autism support group
- ❖ Sleep education and training.
- ❖ The picture exchange communication system.
- ❖ Medication may be used to treat some difficulties that are common with ASD. This would allow people to have fewer problems with irritability, aggression, repetitive behaviour, hyperactivity, attention problems and anxiety and depression.
- ❖ Behaviour programs that involves cognitive behavioural therapy.
- ❖ Social skills program such as Skillstreaming which would help children with their social skills.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is Autism Spectrum Disorder curable?

There is currently no cure for autism spectrum disorder however there is a range of therapies in place to improve the communicational skills and aid in educational and social development.

2. What communication advice could be given to parents with children suffering from ASD?

It would be best to use the child's name when addressing them, keep background noise as low as possible, keep the language simple, speak slowly and clearly, accompany what they are saying with gestures and allow time for the child to process what they have been told.

3. Should my child be enrolled in a school with special curriculum designed for children diagnosed with autism?

Research shows that children with autism benefit from access to peers who are age-appropriate and typically developing. It would be best to provide services to children with ASD in a group that assume they all need a similar program and service. A curriculum that supports the achievement of individual outcomes should be adopted.

4. How is Autism Spectrum Disorder defined?

Autism spectrum disorder is classified with difficulties in two areas of behaviours: social communication and repetition and insistence on sameness. Most individuals undergoing ASD were found to have language delays and intellectual disabilities which affect the development of nonverbal problem-solving, everyday self-care and language.

5. How young can a child be to receive a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Clear symptoms that would be identified as a reliable diagnosis with Autism Spectrum Disorder were mostly found in children aged 18-24 months. However, as children age, the signs and symptoms gradually increases its reliability and validity.

6. What progress has been made so far in autism research?

Scientists have made significant progress in discovering the genes that contribute to autism. With knowledge adopted from the researches, there has been progress in understanding the different cells of the brain of a person with autism. Future researches are working on a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that may lead to autism.



References

<http://a4.org.au/node/1340>

<https://iancommunity.org/autism-faq>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>

<http://vkool.com/autism-spectrum-disorder/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/faq>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/treatment/>

<https://medlineplus.gov/autismspectrumdisorder.html>

<https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/science/gene-env/index.cfm>

<https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/autism-update/consumer/>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd/index.shtml>

<http://drhyman.com/blog/2010/12/09/breakthrough-discovery-on-the-causes-of-autism/>

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

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/autism-learning-disabilities/autism-spectrum-disorders.htm>