



# Understanding autism spectrum disorder



As a child grows, they reach certain milestones in how they speak, move, learn, play, and behave. If your child isn't reaching them or is behaving differently from what you would expect, it's natural to be worried.

## What is autism spectrum disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that causes people to behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most people. ASD impacts all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and includes a spectrum of conditions.

## Recognizing signs and symptoms of ASD

Symptoms of ASD tend to appear in the first two years of life. They differ from child to child, but common symptoms fall into three main groups:

### Social interactions

Children with ASD often have trouble connecting with others. They might:

- Show limited interest in other people.
- Avoid making or keeping eye contact.
- Not play with other children.
- Be unaware of emotions in themselves or others.

**1 in 36**

children in the U.S.  
have ASD\*

**4x**

more common in  
boys than girls\*



## Communications

A delay in talking or an unusual speech pattern is a common sign of ASD. Children with ASD also might not:

- Respond to their name by 9 months of age.
- Show facial expressions, like happy, sad, or angry, by 9 months.
- Use simple gestures, such as waving good-bye, by 12 months.
- Be able to follow a conversation.

## Restrictive or repetitive behaviors

People with ASD often show repetitive or restrictive behaviors, often referred to as stimming or self-stimulatory behaviors. Examples include:

- Repeating words or phrases.
- Repetitive body movements like pacing back and forth, rocking, or hand flapping.
- Intense, highly focused behavior or interests, such as with specific topics or moving objects.
- Difficulty with changes to routine.
- Sensory processing difficulties like being more or less sensitive to light, odors, sound, taste, or touch.

## Talking with your child's doctor

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children get screened for ASD at their 18- and 24-month exams. If you notice early warning signs in your child before then, it's important to talk with their doctor. Here's how to start that process.

**Take notes on what you see.** Keep a record of specific behaviors or milestones your child may be missing.

**Express your concerns** and ask for an ASD evaluation. The doctor will guide you on the next steps.

## Finding the right treatment

Early treatment of ASD is vital to helping children build success in school and life. Common autism treatments include behavior therapy, nutritional therapy, physical therapy, play-based therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language therapy.

Because each person with ASD has unique needs, treatment is specific to the individual. All focus on enhancing your child's progress and reducing the impact of ASD on their daily life. With the right routine, support, and treatment, a child with autism can thrive.

**If you have questions,**

connect with us on the Sydney<sup>SM</sup> Health mobile app or at [anthem.com/ca](https://www.anthem.com/ca).



### Sources:

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP): *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (accessed June 2023); [aap.org](https://www.aap.org).  
Autism Speaks: *What Is Autism?* (accessed June 2023); [autismspeaks.org](https://www.autismspeaks.org).  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (accessed June 2023); [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).  
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (accessed June 2023); [nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov).

\* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder* (accessed June 2023); [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

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