



Autism Fact Sheet

What are Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by a problem with the brain. There is usually nothing about how a person with an ASD looks that sets them apart from other people, but they may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most people. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary – from gifted to severely challenged.

What are the most common symptoms?

People with ASDs may have problems with social, emotional, and communication skills. They might repeat certain behaviors and might not want change in their daily activities. Many people with ASDs also have different ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to things.

What is the cause of the syndrome?

There is no known single cause for ASDs. It is generally accepted that ASDs are caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function, since brain scans show differences in the shape and structure of the brain in autistic versus non-autistic children. Researchers are investigating a number of theories, including the link between heredity, genetics and medical problems.

How many people are affected?

A 2007 Centers for Disease Control report found that 1 in 150 children in America are affected by ASDs.

How ASDs diagnosed?

There are no medical tests for diagnosing ASDs. People with ASDs have some degree of impairment in social interaction, social communication and imagination. To be diagnosed as having an ASD, a child must be observed over time by professionals skilled in determining communication, behavioral and developmental levels.

How are ASDs treated?

Right now, the main research-based treatment for ASDs is intensive structured teaching of skills, often called behavioral intervention. It is very important to begin this intervention as early as possible in order to help the child affected by ASDs reach his or her full potential. Acting early can make a real difference!