

Autism Awareness

What is Autism?

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Autism spectrum disorder is a brain development disorder which results in communication, socialization, and development problems. With autism there is a developmental delay of many basic skills, most notably the ability to socialize or form relationships with others as well as the ability to communicate and to use imagination. People with autism may also exhibit various forms of repetitive or restricted behaviour.

Autism is four times more common in boys than in girls and affects an estimated 10-20 of every 10,000 people. Unfortunately, autism is on the rise in

India as well as abroad.

Early Signs of Autism

Early diagnosis and intervention are the best way to manage autism. But the irony is that the signs being very subtle, it is very difficult for parents as well as professionals to diagnose or even suspect ASD.

Here are some pointers towards the possibility of autism in a child:

By 12 months

- Not making eye contact
- Absence of smiling
- Not upset when mother departs
- Not pointing at the things he/she desires
- Not waving bye-bye

12 to 15 months

- Not lifting up hands to be picked up
- Not saying 'mama', 'dada', etc.
- Poor imitation of simple actions like clapping
- Poor response to name when called

15 to 18 months

- Unable to play appropriately with toys in a functional way and/or unable to play pretend games
- Not picking up new words
- Not pointing to body parts
- Not bringing objects to adults just to show them

18 to 24 months

- Not combining noun and verb in a sentence
- Repetitive hand flapping, toe walking, spinning, etc.
- Limited range of facial expressions

2 to 3 years

- Repetitive non functional use of objects like banging, spinning, lining up, etc.
- Interest in parts of objects rather than the whole object e.g. Wheels of a toy car
- Not imitating household work

3 to 5 years

- Highly restricted and unusual interests
- Inflexible adherence to routines

Diagnosis of Autism

There are no medical tests for diagnosing autism. A diagnosis is generally made based on observation of the individual's communication, behaviour, and developmental levels.

Management of Autism

Although there isn't a known cure for autism early intervention with appropriate technique for developing social skills and communication can help the child a lot.

Parent based intervention where parents are trained to manage the child at home across various activities at home gives the best outcome. Research shows a child needs to be engaged for at least 20 hours a week to help him or her improve. This is possible only if parents and family members participate actively in the program.

The best results are when intervention starts before 2 years of age. This is the time the brain is growing rapidly in children so it is possible to make connections in the brain easily.

