



BalanceHealthSM Newsletter

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Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

In recognition of National Autism Awareness Month, we wanted to provide some insight into the disorder and provide some helpful coping mechanisms for those caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Autism is a developmental disability characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors.

The CDC reports that about 1 in 88 children have ASD, making it a prevalent health issue in the United States. ASD varies widely in severity ranging from functional to seriously impaired. However, children with ASD generally have problems in three developmental areas including social interaction, language and behavior. ASD usually appears in early childhood, before age 3. Some children will show signs of autism in early infancy. However, other children may develop normally for the first few months or even years of life and then suddenly become withdrawn or lose language skills they have already acquired.

Some common signs of ASD, include, but are not limited to:

- Poor eye contact

- Delayed speech or unusual speaking patterns
- Aversion to cuddling, hugging, or other forms of affection
- Preferring to play alone
- Being unaware of others' feelings
- Not asking for help when needed
- Failure to respond to their name
- Focusing on details, but cannot understand the big picture
- Performing repetitive motions such as rocking
- Becoming extremely disturbed or upset whenever their routine is interrupted

It is important to remember that the signs above do not necessarily indicate ASD and there can be many other reasons a child exhibits these behaviors. It is also important to note that isolated incidents of any of these signs are not a cause for alarm, however if you observe a pattern of social, linguistic, or behavioral abnormalities or delayed development, you may want to discuss your concerns with your child's pediatrician.

Unfortunately, Autism Spectrum Disorders are not yet fully understood by the medical community. There

For more information or advice about autism contact your Wellness Coordinator by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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is currently no cure for ASD and since researchers have yet to pinpoint exactly what causes these developmental disorders there is no way to prevent it. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the severity, symptoms, and patterns of behavior vary so greatly from one person with ASD to another, that there is no one-size-fits-all treatment.

The good news is that there are interventions and therapies available and the earlier they are started the more effective they will be. The main goal of treatment is to maximize your child's ability to function by reducing autism symptoms and supporting development and learning.

The Mayo Clinic cites the following therapies as viable early treatment options for children with ASD:

Behavior & Communication Therapies

Many programs address the range of social, language and behavioral difficulties associated with autism. Some programs focus on reducing problem behaviors and teaching new skills. Others focus on teaching children how to act in social situations or how to communicate better with other people.

Educational Therapies

Children with autism often respond well to highly structured education programs. Successful programs often include a team of specialists and a variety of activities to improve social skills, communication and behavior. Preschool children who receive intensive, individualized behavioral interventions often show good progress.

Family Therapies

Parents and family members can learn how to play and interact with their children in ways that promote social interaction skills, manage problem behaviors, and teach daily living skills and communication.

Medication Therapies

No medication can improve the core signs of autism, but certain medications can help control symptoms. For example, if a child experiences anxiety, severe behavior problems, or hyperactivity with ASD, medications may be prescribed to help address these symptoms.

Autism is a lifelong disorder, but sometimes symptoms lessen with age. With pointed therapy and support, some children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can learn to function well and lead fulfilling and prosperous lives. For additional thorough and detailed information regarding ASD, consult the following resource:

<http://www.hhs.gov/autism/>

Autism Spectrum Disorders are very complex and this article is designed only to give a general overview and is not intended as medical advice

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