

Autism Factsheet

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a group of closely related disorders that affect a person's ability to interact with the world around them.

The complex, lifelong disability is called a spectrum disorder because the range and severity of the difficulties people face can vary widely.

Classic autism, Asperger's syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder all share autism's core symptoms, namely

- Impaired social interaction
- Impaired communication, and
- Restricted and repetitive interests, behaviour and activity

Approximately one in 160 children in Australia is diagnosed with ASD.

Types of autism

There are three main types of autism.

Classic autism (or autistic disorder)

- Is diagnosed in individuals with impairments in social interaction and communication as well as restricted and repetitive interests, activities and behaviours
- Generally evident before three years of age

Asperger's syndrome

- A milder form of autism
- Those diagnosed have the same difficulties as classic autism
- However, unlike classic autism, they do not have a significant delay in language acquisition, cognitive abilities, or self-help skills
- As speech develops at the normal time, Asperger's is often detected later

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (sometimes referred to as atypical autism)

- The diagnosis is made when an individual has a marked social impairment but fails to meet full criteria for classic autism or Asperger's syndrome
- Individuals may also have communication impairments, repetitive or restricted interests, activities or behaviour

Common features of autism

Though the way the disorder affects each individual is unique, there are common features of autism. These features include

Impaired social interaction, such as

- Lack of empathy
- Difficulties forming and sustaining friendships
- Speaking about a narrow range of favourite topics, with little regard for the interests of the person to whom they are speaking
- Lack of seeking to share enjoyment, activities and interests with other people

- Difficulties with emotional and social responsiveness
- Difficulties initiating and sustaining conversations
- Limited imaginative or make belief play

Impaired communication, such as

- Delayed or poor language development
- Inability to understand social cues like tone of voice and facial expressions
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Difficulty interpreting what others are thinking or feeling, and a tendency to take things literally
- Limited use and understanding of non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expression and gestures
- Stereotyped and repetitive use of language, such as repeating phrases from television

Restricted and repetitive interests, behaviour and activity, such as

- Unusual or repetitive behaviours and body movements, such as hand flapping or rocking
- Unusual responses to sensory input including intense interest in or intense aversions to certain textures, sounds, movements, tastes or visual patterns or lights
- Unusually intense or focused interests
- Adherence to non-functional routines, such as insisting on driving home the same route each day

How can Just Better Care help?

Just Better Care can support the individual and the family with respite care services, lifestyle support, transportation and other services that may enable the individual to live their life to their fullest.

References

[Autism Spectrum Australia \(Aspect\)](#)

[Autism Victoria](#)

[Autism Awareness](#)

[Autism Queensland Inc](#)