**What is autism?**

**Autistic people may act in a different way to other people**

Autistic people may:

* find it hard to communicate and interact with other people
* find it hard to understand how other people think or feel
* find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable
* get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events
* take longer to understand information
* do or think the same things repeatedly.

**Signs of autism in children**

**Autism in young children**

Signs of autism in young children include:

* not responding to their name
* avoiding eye contact
* not smiling when you smile at them
* getting very upset if they do not like a certain taste, smell or sound
* repetitive movements, such as flapping their hands, flicking their fingers or rocking their body
* not talking as much as other children
* not doing as much pretend play
* repeating the same phrases

**Autism in older children**

Signs of autism in older children include:

* not seeming to understand what others are thinking or feeling
* unusual speech, such as repeating phrases and talking ‘at’ others
* liking a strict daily routine and getting very upset if it changes
* having a very keen interest in certain subjects or activities
* getting very upset if you ask them to do something
* finding it hard to make friends or preferring to be on their own
* taking things very literally.
* finding it hard to say how they feel.

**Autism is not an illness**

Being autistic does not mean you have an illness or disease. It means your brain works in a different way from other people.

It's something you're born with. Signs of autism might be noticed when you're very young, or not until you're older.

If you're autistic, you're autistic your whole life.

Autism is not a medical condition with treatments or a "cure". But some people need support to help them with certain things.

**Autistic people can live a full life**

Being autistic does not have to stop you having a good life.

Like everyone, autistic people have things they're good at as well as things they struggle with.

Being autistic does not mean you can never make friends, have relationships or get a job. But you might need extra help with these things.

**Autism is different for everyone**

Autism is a spectrum. This means everybody with autism is different.

Some autistic people need little or no support. Others may need help from a parent or carer every day.

**Some people use other names for autism**

There are other names for autism used by some people, such as:

* autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the medical name for autism
* Asperger's (or Asperger syndrome) is used by some people to describe autistic people with average or above average intelligence

More about Asperger's

People with Asperger's do not have the same learning disabilities that many people with autism have, but they might have a specific learning difficulty.

Some people call this "high-functioning" autism.

Doctors do not diagnose people with Asperger's anymore because it's now thought of as part of autism spectrum disorder. But if you were diagnosed with it before, this will stay as your diagnosis.

**It's not clear what causes autism**

Nobody knows what causes autism, or if it has a cause.

It can affect people in the same family. So it may sometimes be passed on to a child by their parents.

Autism is:

* not caused by bad parenting
* not caused by vaccines, such as the MMR vaccine
* not linked to diet
* not an infection you can spread to other people

**Autistic people can have any level of intelligence**

Some autistic people have average or above average intelligence.

Some autistic people have a learning disability. This means they may find it hard to look after themselves and need help with daily life.

**Autistic people may have other conditions**

Autistic people often have other conditions, such as:

* attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
* dyslexia
* anxiety
* depression
* epilepsy