



ABCs OF ASD

A factsheet on Autism Spectrum Disorder for Journalists

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder of impaired communication and behavior whose symptoms generally appear in the first two years of life.

Most people with ASD will have several of the following behaviors:

- Making little or inconsistent eye contact
- Having a tendency not to look at or listen to people
- Failing to, or being slow to, respond to someone calling their name or to other verbal attempts to gain attention
- Having an unusual tone of voice that may sound sing-song or flat and robot-like
- Repeating certain behaviors or having unusual behaviors, such as repeating words or phrases (a behavior called echolalia)
- Having a lasting intense interest in certain topics, such as numbers, details, or facts
- Being more sensitive or less sensitive than other people to sensory input, such as light, noise, clothing, or temperature

Impact

Although ASD can be a lifelong disorder, treatments and services can improve a person's symptoms and ability to function. 1 in 160 children has an ASD.

People with ASD may also have many strengths, including being able to learn things in detail and have a good long term memory; they may also excel in math, science, music, or art.

How is ASD diagnosed?

Doctors diagnose ASD by looking at a person's behavior and development. ASD can usually be reliably diagnosed by the age of two. The exact causes of ASD is unknown, but studies suggest that environmental factors together with genes affect development, to lead to ASD.

Can ASD be cured?

A cure for ASD is not available. Treatment for ASD should begin as soon as possible after diagnosis. Early treatment for ASD is important because proper care can reduce individuals' difficulties while helping them learn new skills and make the most of their strengths.

While some individuals with ASD are able to live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support.

Treatment:

- A doctor may use medication to treat aggression, hyperactivity or depression that are common with ASD. Behavioral, psychological, educational, or skill-building interventions also help people with ASD.
- Interventions for people with ASD need to be accompanied by broader actions for making physical, social and attitudinal environments more accessible, inclusive and supportive.
- The healthcare needs of people with ASD are complex and require a range of integrated services, including health promotion, care, rehabilitation services, and collaboration with other sectors such as the education, employment and social sectors.
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- Assistive technology can benefit people with ASD by enhancing communication, promoting independence and increasing social interactions.

Empowering caregivers

ASDs often impose significant emotional and economic burden on people with these disorders and their families. Caring for children with the severe spectrum of the condition may be demanding, especially where access to services and support are inadequate. Therefore the empowerment of caregivers is increasingly being recognised as a critical component of care interventions for children with ASD.

Stigma and discrimination

Worldwide, people with ASD are often subject to stigma, discrimination and human rights violations.

- Globally, access to services and support for people with ASD is inadequate.
- People with ASD are often subject to stigma and discrimination, including **unjust deprivation of health, education** and opportunities to **engage and participate** in their communities.

People with ASD have the same health problems that affect the general population plus may have specific health-care needs related to ASD or other co-occurring conditions.

They may be more vulnerable to developing chronic non-communicable conditions because of behavioural risk factors such as physical inactivity and poor dietary preferences, and are at greater risk of violence, injury and abuse.

People with ASD require accessible health services for general healthcare needs like the rest of the population, including promotive and preventive services and treatment of acute and chronic illness. Nevertheless, people with ASD have higher rates of unmet healthcare needs compared with the general population. They are also more vulnerable during humanitarian emergencies. A common barrier is created by **healthcare providers' inadequate knowledge** of ASD and misconceptions.

Key issues:

- The prevalence of ASD in many low- and middle-income countries is so far unknown. Over the past 50 years, the prevalence of ASD appears to be increasing globally, probably due to improved awareness, better diagnoses and reporting.
- In May 2014, the 67th Health Assembly adopted a resolution 'World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.8: Comprehensive and coordinated efforts for the management of autism spectrum disorders to promote country-level responses to ASD and other developmental disorders.'

References:

- 1) www.nimh.nih.gov
- 2) <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders>
- 3) https://www.who.int/mental_health/maternal-child/WHA67.8_resolution_autism.pdf

ABCs of ASD : A factsheet on Autism Spectrum Disorder for Journalists
This resource was designed by REACH as part of our efforts to help improve
the quality and frequency of media reporting on NCDs.



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