

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



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Autism spectrum disorder falls under the umbrella of **neurodevelopmental disorders**. It can be broadly conceptualized as a **different way of thinking, seeing, and interacting with the world**. Manifestations vary greatly depending on severity, developmental level, and chronological age (hence the term **spectrum**).

DEFINITION

DIAGNOSIS

There are many screening and diagnostic tools available to assess for autism spectrum disorder. These may be interview-based or incorporate elements of observation and interaction. Eligibility requirements for diagnosis vary by region; included below are the standardized **DSM 5 criteria**.

CRITERION A

Persistent **deficits in social communication and social interaction** across multiple contexts

Deficits in **social-emotional reciprocity**

Deficits in **nonverbal communicative behaviours** used for social interaction



Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding **relationships**

CRITERION B

Restricted, repetitive **patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities**

Stereotyped or repetitive **motor movements**, use of objects, or speech



Insistence on **sameness**, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behaviour

Highly **restricted, fixated interests** (abnormal in intensity or focus)

Hyper- or hyporeactivity to **sensory input** or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

CRITERION C

Symptoms must be present in the **early developmental period**



CRITERION D

Symptoms cause **clinically significant impairment** in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning

CRITERION E

These disturbances are not better explained by **intellectual disability** or **global developmental delay**

Severity is based on **social communication impairments** and **restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour**:

1

Requiring support

2

Requiring **substantial** support

3

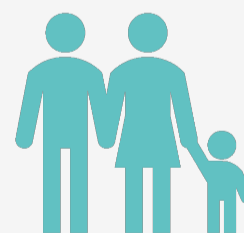
Requiring **very substantial** support

DDX

Autism spectrum disorder can often resemble other conditions including Rett syndrome, selective mutism, language disorders, ADHD, and schizophrenia.

ETIOLOGY

Autism spectrum disorder has **no single known cause**. Both **genetics** and **environmental factors** (e.g. viral infections, complications during pregnancy, parental age) may play a role. However, **no link has been shown between vaccines and autism**.



Source: Mayo Clinic. Autism spectrum disorder. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352928>. Published January 6, 2018.

TREATMENT

SOCIAL

Broader **social programs** to assist with housing and poverty, as well as more individualized approaches involving **peer-based connections** and ensuring **family supports**



PSYCHOLOGICAL

Behaviour and communication therapies (e.g. **Applied Behaviour Analysis**), educational programs, family therapies, speech and language programs, occupational therapy



BIOLOGICAL

Pharmacotherapy / medications to address specific symptoms (e.g. stimulants for comorbid ADHD, antipsychotics for externalizing behaviour, antidepressants for mood and anxiety concerns)

