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Autism

Autism belongs to a group of spectrum disorders, a collection of disorders with similar features, known as the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), with Autistic Disorder being the most common of the ASDs. Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by the inability of social interactions and communications. It affects the brain and makes communicating and interacting with others difficult and uncomfortable. Those who have Autism can have very different symptoms; while one person might have mild symptoms, someone else may have more severe ones. There are three main categories of the Autism Spectrum Disorders depending on the severity of the person's symptoms: Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. The symptoms for all three types of the ASDs aren't exactly identical, but they are all very similar to one another.

Autistic Disorder is also known as the "classic" autism and is the most common of the ASDs. It is marked by delays in language and difficulties with social interactions. Children who have Autistic Disorder don't respond to their name and resist being held or cuddled. Asperger Syndrome is a milder version of Autistic Disorder. Those who have Asperger Syndrome do not have any delays in language or impaired intellectual abilities. They do, on the other hand, seem to be lost in their own world, have social challenges, and tend to remember irrelevant information. Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) is milder, and has fewer symptoms, compared to those with Autistic Disorder. PDD delays a child's ability to develop basic skills such as socializing, communicating with others, and have trouble using their imagination. The three different types of ASDs are very alike to one another, but they do have their differences. The most common thing all three share is the fact that the child has problem socializing with others. Socializing and communicating is an important skill that children learn when they are very young. Unfortunately, Autism is diagnosed at a very young age when children use their imagination the most.

The average age of diagnosis for Autism is when the child is about three years of age. The best way to identify if a child has Autism is to observe how they behave and communicate with those around them. Parents and doctors are often alerted that there is a problem with the child when they don't develop speech at the age of two, doesn't babble, coo, or use hand gestures at 12 months, and lose language or social skills at any age. Even though there is no known cause or prevention towards Autism, parents can still notice things about their child that may help them detect the disorder. Parents of Autistic children may notice their child has trouble keeping eye contact, unresponsive to smiles, may treat others as if they are objects, have delay in language, and difficulty with social interactions. Autistic children's senses are heightened so they may find normal noises unbearable and painful to hear. They might throw their hands over their ears just to block out the noise. The child may lack genuine empathy for others and have difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication. Some Autistic children will perform repeated body movements like rocking their body back and forth. When routines are changed, they may show unusual distress and have intense tantrums. Instead of playing interactive games with others, Autistic children will withdraw and prefer to play alone—distancing themselves from those around them.

It may appear that an Autistic child doesn't want friends, but some of them actually do. Some children with Autism show less interest in making friends because they prefer to be alone.

Others look for friendship, but find it very difficult to do so because they lack social skills. It's hard to be friends with an Autistic child because they have a difficult time showing their emotions. Autistic children can feel affection, but might not express it the same way as others. Being around an Autistic child requires a lot of patience. Majority of the time, patience isn't what a lot of children have. Autistic children look at things differently than others. Even a simple conversation can take a lot of effort for an Autistic child to continue because they have a short attention span. Instead of communicating with words, they might use hand gestures to replace terms. To Autistic children, communicating can be as foreign as learning a new language. They have difficulty understanding social cues like knowing when to smile, scowl, or noticing pauses where they should jump into the conversation and talk about their thoughts on the subject. Basically, it takes a lot of work for a child with Autism to do what comes naturally to other people.

Since there is no known cause for Autism, scientists are still trying to figure out if it is an environmental problem or if it's due to genetics. However, it is certain that, unlike the flu, Autism is not contagious. Studies have shown that four times as many boys are diagnosed with Autism compared to girls. Girls might have a lower chance of having Autism compared to boys because they tend to have stronger social inclinations. Yet, the number of Autistic children has increased dramatically over time, making scientists wonder if it's due to the changes in our environment over the years. Scientists researching about environmental causes of Autism focus on potential factors in the environment that both fetuses and babies are exposed to. This includes viruses, pesticides, and chemicals in everyday household products. With environmental causes in mind, some scientists believe that the environment isn't the cause of Autism, genetics is. Autism has been recognized as a genetically based disease, but it doesn't seem to be passed along in families. Since people with Autism rarely ever have children of their own, it's unlikely for mutations to become widespread in populations.

There is still ongoing research for nutritional causes and toxic chemical exposure throughout development and labor. It is well known that as women get older, pregnancy and birth becomes riskier for them. Maternal age has been linked to numerous developmental disorders in children. Studies have confirmed that mothers of older age are more likely to give birth to an Autistic child than younger women. Mothers over the age of 40 have a 51% higher risk of giving birth to a child with Autism compared to mother's ages 25-29, and a 77% higher risk than mothers under the age of 25.

There *are* several treatments for Autism, but there is *no* cure. There is no single treatment that will be effective for everyone with the disorder. However, there are several treatments that can end up benefiting children that have Autism. Early detection is a great way to help Autistic children adjust, or even overcome, several difficulties. Medications can help some children who have Autism, but no specific drug targets the disorder. The medications help manage behavioral manifestations of the disorder and help treat seizures, anxiety, behavioral and emotional problems, and hyperactivity. Another treatment is behavioral therapy. It can teach social, motor, and cognitive thinking skills. Early treatment can have a great impact on the child, but they may need more help as they grow up. Treatment for children with Autism can change as they get older and could possibly last throughout their entire lifetime. It usually is best to begin treatment soon after the child is diagnosed with the disorder.

There are some treatments that haven't been tested yet for safety, but some parents do claim that it helped their child's autism. Hyperbaric oxygen chamber therapy is one of them. The patient will be in a pressurized chamber breathing in extra oxygen. However, the treatment can

cause claustrophobia, bruising of the eardrums, sinus pain, and very rarely, seizures. Another treatment is chelation therapy. Some people believe that Autism is caused by Mercury exposures, such as from childhood vaccines. Chelation therapy removes unwanted metals from a person's bloodstream. It is usually used for treatment of heavy metal poisoning, but some people have used chelation therapy to help treat Autism. The treatment is a bit risky because it could remove needed electrolytes from the body. There have been reported cases of cardiac arrest and death due to chelation therapy. These treatments aren't always successful because of the risk factors, and may end up inflicting harm to the child. However, there are future treatments coming for Autistic children. These treatments include antibiotics, IVIG, and using stem cells. These future treatment have potential in being successful, but for now, Autism still remains a huge mystery. Scientists have yet to figure out the cause of this disorder, and find out the best ways to help treat a child with Autism.

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