

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Definition

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurobehavioral disorder which affects the way the brain functions. As a result, autistic individuals have difficulties with communication and social interaction, and unusual patterns of behavior, activities and interests. Autism is a spectrum disorder, which means that each individual can be affected differently from mild to severe impairments.

Common Behaviors in Autism

While these are some common behaviors seen in autistic children, they can also be seen in developmentally normal children. It is the combination of behaviors that makes autism a possible diagnosis.

Language & Communication	Social Skills
No babbling by 11 months	No or poor eye contact
No gestures by 12 months	Preference for solitary play
No words by 18 months	No or limited shared interest/enjoyment
Doesn't respond to name	Delayed pretend or imaginative play
Poor turn-taking in conversation	Lines up toys or interested in moving parts
Echolalia or repetitive words/phrases	Specific ways/rituals to perform activities
Odd gestures or body movements	Tends to take things literally

Causes

Autism is a multi-factorial disorder. This means there is no “one cause” for autism but rather there are various genetic and environmental factors that interact and contribute to autism. If your child is diagnosed with autism, your pediatrician will order some blood work to investigate for some medical and genetic causes.

Autism is not caused by MMR or any other immunizations. For more information on this topic, please visit:

<http://www.immunize.ca/en/publications-resources/questions/autism.aspx>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Concerns/Autism/antigens.html>

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Diagnosis

Determining that a child has autism often requires input from a multidisciplinary team. Diagnosis is based on specific criteria set forth by the DSM-5, which is the Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders.

There are various ways that you can be diagnosed:

- Community Pediatrician, in certain situations with input from your child's current multi-disciplinary team
- Child Developmental Services at the Child Developmental Centre
- Private assessment by trained psychologist
- Some specialized preschools also offer private assessments

In 2013, DSM-5 updated the autism criteria, and removed the previously used terms of Asperger's Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD). Now, all individuals use the common terminology of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

No matter which route you choose, you are encouraged to attend after a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder at Child Developmental Services. Ask your pediatrician for more information.

Treatment

Autism is a life-long condition for which there is no cure. However, with intensive early intervention, some individuals improve their language and social skills. This involves a multidisciplinary team that can include: speech language pathologist (SLP), occupational therapist (OT), physiotherapist (PT), behavioral therapist, psychologist and/or other trained professional. Treatment is often done as a combination of program-based and in-home supports. In Calgary, there are a variety of specialized preschool and schools. More information on this can be obtained from your local school board.

Alternative treatments for autism include things such as specific diets or supplements. These are not widely recommended in autism as most do not stand up to scientific standards. Many families will explore alternative treatments, and it is important to ensure that you are making an informed decision. More information on evidence-based alternative treatments is available from Autism Calgary. The pediatricians at Infinity Pediatrics do not promote or endorse a specific alternate treatment for autism. But it is important to tell your child's pediatrician if you have chosen to explore an alternative treatment.

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Funding & Support

Preschool Unit Funding (PUF)

- A trained specialist, such as SLP, OT or PT submits a diagnostic report on the behalf of families to obtain funding for their service.
- The assessment usually needs to be done after March for program funding for the following September
- 3 years of funding available, generally starting age 2.5 to 3 years old and continues for first year of kindergarten

Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD)

- Family needs to open file (see their handout)
- Takes about 6-8 weeks from when file is open for a case worker to contact file
- They do require a letter of diagnosis from a physician

Disability Tax Credit Certificate, T2201

- Form downloadable from CRA website www.cra-arc.gc.ca/disability
- Families fill in page 1, and a qualified practitioner fills in the rest
- Please see our separate handout for more information on this

Private drug plan

Explore what is covered on your private drug plan for your child. Make sure to pay attention to if the year is “calendar year” or “school year”

Please also refer to our handout called Autism Resources

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