



# Information for Patients & Caregivers

What to do if your child has Autism?

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Finding out that your child has autism is very upsetting. But understanding the disease and getting help early on can make a difference to you and your child's life.

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that makes your child's brain work in a different way from most children's brains.

WHAT DOCTORS CALL IT?

Doctors used to use different names for different types of autism, depending on the severity of symptoms. At present, doctors rarely make such distinctions. You will likely hear: *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*.

All people with autism are described as being on the "autism spectrum". This means that they all have the same issues but these issues may seem different in different people.

DOCTORS ARE NOT SURE WHAT CAUSES AUTISM

It may be a combination or loss of certain genes during embryonic development.

You may worry that something you have done has caused it, but there is no evidence to show this could be true.

There is also no evidence that the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine can cause autism.

- The onset of autism typically occurs in early childhood
- Nearly 80-90% of parents noticed problems by 24 months of age.
  - 200% of parents noticed problems before 12 months of age.

Some children develop normally in early childhood and then stop gaining new, or lose previous, skills.

Other children may not show symptoms until later childhood or adolescence when they face social challenges in life, e.g. when going to school or college.

### Symptoms of Autism in Children

- You may notice that your child:
- Doesn't look at you when you call them.
  - Doesn't want to cuddle with you.
  - Doesn't smile in response to you.
  - Has poor facial expressions.
  - Has unusual moods or emotional reactions.
  - Rarely uses gestures e.g., doesn't wave goodbye.
  - Repeats the same words or phrases.
  - Says 'you', 'she' or 'he' instead of saying 'I'.
  - Doesn't want to play with other children.
  - Has difficulties in playing "pretend" games or roleplay.
  - Prefers repetitive or stereotyped play (e.g. opening and closing doors).
  - Has repetitive movements such as:
    - Hand flapping.
    - Spinning self in circles.
    - Running repetitively back and forth.
    - Finger flicking.

### Parents Don't Always Recognise the Signs and Symptoms of

Some children can develop adaptive mechanisms to manage social situations. They can mimic gestures and conversational style of other people.



If you think your child may have autism, talk to your doctor or see a specialist.

Only a healthcare professional can diagnose autism

Symptoms in Adults

Symptoms that have been present in childhood may continue into adulthood. New symptoms and phobias may also develop.



### Associated Conditions

Autism is frequently accompanied by other diseases, including:

- Mental health conditions:**
  - Mood disorders.
  - Tics.
  - Schizophrenia.
- Neurodevelopmental disorders:**
  - Delay in development.
  - Learning difficulties.
  - Impairment of speech and language.
  - Problems with coordination.
- Sensory processing difficulties:**
  - Defensiveness from tactile interactions.
- Epilepsy and seizures.**
- Challenging behaviours:**
  - Violence.
  - Self-injurious behaviours.
- Sleep disorders.**
- Feeding and eating problems:**
  - Vitamin deficiency.
  - Constipation.
  - Eating non-food items.

Specialist Care

When your child is seen by a Paediatrician, the doctor will talk to you about your child's development and behaviour.

The doctor may ask how your child feels at home, in school, and in the community.

You may be requested to fill in a specific questionnaire. Try to give accurate answers. Inform your doctor if you have any concerns.

The doctor will play with your child to see how the child learns, speaks, behaves, and moves. The doctor may perform a brief test to evaluate basic learning skills.

If your doctor refers your child to a Specialist, be sure to follow the instructions the doctor gives you.



The Specialist will do a detailed examination and assessment of your child's skills.

Your specialist may also request certain tests to check for underlying diseases. Once all the tests are complete, the Specialist will discuss the diagnosis with you and your child. They will outline further treatment options.

The Specialist will also guide you on the support options available to help you and your family cope with the changes, and where to get further help and information.

You can ask the doctor any questions about autism. Let the doctor know if you need a copy of your care plan or any kind of extra support.

Your doctor will evaluate each of these conditions and recommend treatment.

Your doctor may refer your child to specialists working in a multidisciplinary team.

Treatment Options

It's important to understand that there is no medication to cure autism.

Treatments cannot remove symptoms of autism or change how your child's brain works.

Treatment can help your child with some issues and associated conditions caused by autism.

Early intervention helps improve long-term outcomes for children. The efficacy of the treatment correlates with the support coming from parent and their involvement in the process.

The main treatment approaches focus on teaching your child and helping to change their behaviour.

Note that different children need different types and different levels of treatment:

- Your doctor will look at your child's strengths and needs before suggesting a particular treatment.

### Treatment Therapies to Help with Autism

Your Specialist will work in a team of experts who can provide a number of therapies that can help your child to cope with their symptoms. These include:

- Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA).
- Children's Friendship Training (CFT).
- Early Start Denver Model (ESDM).
- Floortime Developmental, Individual Differences, Relationship-Based Approach.
- Learning Experiences and Alternative Program for Preschoolers and their Parents (LEAP).
- Lovaas Model.
- Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children (TEACCH).
- NAS EarlyBird.
- More Than Words (Hanan's program).
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).
- Sign language

The Following Treatments Do Not Improve Symptoms of Autism

- Chelation therapy.
- Hyperbaric oxygen therapy.
- Secretin treatment.
- Vitamin and mineral supplementation.
- Homeopathy.
- Empirical antibiotic and antifungal therapies.
- Exclusion diets (casein-free diet, gluten-free diet, etc.)

A Note for Parents: If you have one child with autism, it is more likely that your future child will develop autism.

### Additional Information

Additional information on diagnosis and management of Autism can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Qatar. The Guideline is available to the public from the MOPH website: [www.moph.gov.qa](http://www.moph.gov.qa).

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Diagnosis in Qatar is made through:

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