



# 5 Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. What is Autism?

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a difference in the way a person's brain works. It can affect how someone learns, communicates, socializes, responds to change, and experiences the world around them. People with autism may interact or communicate in ways that are different from what you might expect, but different does not mean less.

Every person with autism is unique. Some are very social, while others prefer more time alone. Some communicate through speech, while others use gestures, signs, visuals, AAC, or behavior. Many prefer structure and routine, have strong interests, repeat certain actions, or experience sounds, lights, touch, and movement differently. Like everyone else, people with autism experience love, joy, sadness, loneliness, pain, and the full range of emotions—they may simply express them in their own way.



## 2. What Causes Autism?

Autism is believed to result from a complex combination of genetic and environmental factors. It can run in families, although not in a predictable pattern, and many genes involved in brain development and communication have been associated with autism. When researchers refer to “environmental” factors, they mean non-genetic influences on development, such as premature birth, older parental age, and certain illnesses, medications, or exposures during pregnancy.

Parents do not cause autism, and autism is not a curse from God. Vaccines do not cause autism. Many studies have found no link between autism and vaccine type or schedule. Autism is often identified around 18–24 months, which overlaps with the timing of some childhood vaccines, but this timing does not mean vaccines cause autism or developmental delays.



## 3. Why is Autism Becoming More Common?

Autism is being diagnosed more often for several reasons. As we have learned more about autism, the definition has broadened and professionals have become better at recognizing it in people who may have been overlooked in the past, including girls and women, underserved populations, and children with intellectual disabilities or medical/genetic conditions. Some people who were once simply considered “different” are now being identified with autism and receiving appropriate supports. Other factors, including increased survival of premature babies and older parental age, may also contribute to the increase in autism diagnoses.



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## 4. Can Autism Be Cured?

Autism cannot be cured. It is a life-long neurodevelopmental disorder that affects people for their entire lives. Autism is not a disease, but a difference in the way the brain processes the world. Even though autism cannot be cured or reversed, a person with autism can make progress. There is no one treatment for autism. Treatment is individualized to the person with autism and their cognitive, sensory, communication, and behavioral needs.



## 5. What Are Some Common Signs of Autism?

The common signs of autism fall into five categories: social communication challenges, repetitive behaviors and interests, sensory differences, language and movement delays, and unusual mood or reactions. These can look like:

- Difficulty with back-and-forth conversations or understanding social “rules” (e.g., such as the distance you stand from another person or not interrupting).
- Avoiding eye contact or having difficulty understanding body language
- Challenges making friends
- Appearing not to understand the feelings of others
- Repetitive movements such as hand-flapping, rocking, or spinning
- A narrow and intense focus on certain topics or activities
- A strong need for routine and difficulty with change
- Playing with toys in repetitive ways rather than for pretend play or the intended purpose of the toy
- Being overly or under sensitive to common sounds, lights, smells or textures.
- Delays in language skills (e.g., no response to name, not following directions, not speaking or using repetitive words/phrases, speaking with an unusual tone)
- A delayed onset of movement skills or other developmental delays
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- Experiencing unusual levels of anxiety or nervousness
- Having a lack of fear or showing more fear, anxiety, or worry than expected.

**You do not need to have all the answers to help your child grow and thrive. With support, patience, and the right strategies, meaningful progress happens one step at a time.**