



1 in 160 Australians have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), that is 130 000 people with around 1500 people being newly diagnosed each year. Four times as many males as females are affected by autism.

What is an autism spectrum disorder?

An ASD is a lifelong developmental disability characterised by:

- marked difficulties in social interaction
- impaired communication
- restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours
- sensory sensitivities

The word 'spectrum' is used because the range and severity of the difficulties people with an ASD face can vary widely. ASDs include:

- autistic disorder
- Asperger's disorder
- atypical autism (also known as pervasive development disorder – not otherwise specified)

What are the early signs?

Some of the following may be indicators of an autism spectrum disorder. Although, no single indicator necessarily signals autism – usually, a child would present with several indicators from some of the following categories:

Behaviour – inexplicable tantrums, unusual interests, unusual motor movement such as flapping or rocking, difficulty coping with change

Sensory – afraid of everyday sounds, uses peripheral vision to look at objects, eats a very limited range of foods, preoccupation with certain textures, walks on tiptoes

Communication – not responding to their name by 12 months, not pointing or waving by 12 months, loss of words previously used, speech absent at 18 months, selective hearing, unusual language pattern (eg repetitive speech)

Social skills – looks away when you speak to them, does not return your smile, lack of interest in other children, often seems to be in their own world, is unable to follow simple instructions (eg 'Give me your shoes')

Play – prefers to play alone, very limited social play (eg 'Peek-a-boo'), plays with objects in unusual ways such as repetitive spinning or lining up

Is there a cure?

There is presently no known cure for autism spectrum disorders. However, early intervention, specialised education and structured support can help develop a person's skills. Every person with autism will make progress, although each individual's progress will be different because it depends on a number of factors.

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

- aims to build confidence and capacity in people with an autism spectrum disorder, their families and communities by providing information, education and other services.

Autism Spectrum Australia provides a variety of services including:

- Aspect Diagnostic Assessment Service
- Aspect Building Blocks Early Intervention Service
- Aspect Schools (6 base schools with 73 satellite classes including in regional areas)
- Aspect Educational outreach programs
- Aspect Behaviour Support
- Aspect Community Participation - programs for adults with autism
- Aspect Family Initiatives – support and information
- Information - Autism Information Line 1800 8977 8377 and website
- Workshops and information sessions for parents/carers and professional development for teachers and other school staff <http://www.autismtraining.com.au/>

Call the Autism Information Line for more information

1800 069 978 or 02 8977 8377

www.autismspectrum.org.au