

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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What is autism spectrum disorder?

October is Autism Awareness Month.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder. It affects a person's behaviour. And it makes communication and social interactions hard.

ASD can range from mild to severe. The type of symptoms a person has and how severe they are varies. Some children may not be able to function without a lot of help from parents and other caregivers. Others may learn social and verbal skills and lead independent lives as adults.

Finding and treating ASD early has helped many people who have it. They can do things like go to university and work.

Symptoms may include:

- A delay in learning to talk. Or the person may not talk at all.
- Problems using or responding to gestures or pointing, facial expressions, and body posture.
- Problems making eye contact.
- A lack of interest in sharing enjoyment, interests, or achievements with others.
- Body rocking and hand flapping.
- Getting attached to objects or topics.
- A need for sameness and routines.

In most cases, symptoms are noticed by the time a child is 2 years old. But if symptoms are severe, they may be seen as early as when a child is 12 months old.

How is autism spectrum disorder diagnosed?

Doctors use screening questions, examinations, and tests to see how your child behaves and interacts with others. If your doctor thinks your child may have ASD, they may send you to a specialist.

How is autism spectrum disorder treated?

Treatment may involve behavioural training and structured learning. Different programs can help. Some start early in your child's development.

Some children may also need speech or physiotherapy. This can help improve communication and motor skills. They may also need medicine to treat symptoms. Medicine also is used to treat other problems, like anxiety or depression.

Talk to your family healthcare provider or call Health Link at 811, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to learn more.