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PATIENT EDUCATION

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30 Facts to Know about Autism Spectrum Disorder

Lurie Center for Autism

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Though the term "autism" first appeared around 1911, very little was known or medically researched about autism spectrum disorder until the late 20th century. New discoveries and advancements continue to be made today to help individuals on the spectrum achieve their full potential.

30 Facts about Autism

1. Autism spectrum disorder now affects 1 in 68 children. Boys are nearly 5 times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with ASD.
2. Autism spectrum disorder is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the United States. ASD is more common than childhood cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined.
3. The term stems from the Greek word autos meaning "self", autism literally means "alone".
4. Autism spectrum disorder affects all nationalities, all creeds, all religions, all races and both sexes. It doesn't differentiate or affect only one group or another.
5. In the late 1990s, the diagnostic title changed to reflect a more politically correct social environment. Now the proper expression is "people with autism or autism spectrum disorder".

6. Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disability that generally appears before the age of 3.
7. The earlier autism spectrum disorder is diagnosed and treated, the better. Outcomes for children's lives are significantly improved with early diagnosis and treatment.
8. Early behavior-based interventions have positive effects on some children with autism spectrum disorder and less note-worthy effects on other children. Early services need to be based on individual children's needs and learning styles. Services for adults with ASD must be carefully individualized.
9. There is currently no medical detection or cure for autism spectrum disorder.
10. Parents do not and cannot cause autism spectrum disorder. Although the multiple causes of ASD are not known, it is known that parental behavior before, during and after pregnancy does not cause ASD.
11. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder have communication deficits. It is important to distinguish between spoken language and social communication deficits.
12. Autism spectrum disorder is not degenerative. Individuals with ASD can continuously improve. They are most likely to improve with specialized, individualized services and opportunities for supported inclusion.
13. Being nonverbal at age 4 does not mean children with autism spectrum disorder will never speak. Research shows that most will learn to use words and nearly half will learn to speak fluently.
14. Children and adults with autism spectrum disorder often care deeply but lack the ability to spontaneously develop empathic and socially connected typical behavior. Individuals with ASD often want to socially interact but lack the ability to spontaneously develop effective social interaction skills.
15. Autism spectrum disorder costs a family \$60,000 a year on average. The cost of lifelong care can be reduced by 2/3 with early diagnosis and intervention. According to a recent study funded by Autism Speaks, the lifetime costs of autism average \$1.4 million to \$2.4 million.
16. If one identical twin has autism spectrum disorder, there is a 60-96% chance the other twin will have some form of ASD. Although fraternal twins have a lower chance of both having ASD, if one has an ASD the other has up to a 24% chance.
17. Co-morbid medical conditions in autism spectrum disorder are common and may include: allergies, asthma, epilepsy, digestive disorders, feeding disorders, sleeping disorders, sensory integration dysfunction, cognitive impairments and other medical disorders.
18. Up to a third of people with autism spectrum disorder also develop seizure disorders—the rate of seizures in people with ASD is 10 times higher than in the general population.

19. About 10% of children with autism spectrum disorder also have another genetic, neurological, or metabolic disorder.
20. Each child with autism spectrum disorder is a unique individual; people with ASD differ as much from one another as do all people. Children and adults with ASD may speak or interact with others. They may have good eye contact. They may be verbal or non-verbal. They may be very bright, of average intelligence or have cognitive deficits.
21. Hyperlexia, the ability to read above one's age or grade level in school, commonly accompanies autism spectrum disorder.
22. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder may be very creative and find a passion and talent for music, theater, art, dance and singing quite easily.
23. It is widely speculated that Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Andy Warhol and Bill Gates are on the autism spectrum.
24. Researchers and clinicians hypothesize that symptoms of autism spectrum disorder in males and females may differ, leading many females to not be diagnosed in a timely manner.
25. Gender differences in symptoms have been found within the areas of social understanding, social communication, and social imagination.
26. Females with autism spectrum disorder remain an understudied group in research.
27. About 50,000 individuals with autism spectrum disorder will exit high school each year in the United States. Many services required by law end abruptly after high school.
28. 35% of young adults with autism spectrum disorder have not had a job or received postgraduate education after leaving high school.
29. There is no federal requirement for providing supportive services in adulthood. This leaves many families navigating these types of services on their own.
30. Many people with autism spectrum disorder are successfully living and working and contributing to the well being of others in their local communities. This is most likely to happen when appropriate services are delivered during the child's educational years.

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