

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, 2023 states that Autism spectrum disorders(ASD) is a group of conditions marked by challenges in social interaction, communication, and atypical behaviors, including sensitivity to sensory experiences and difficulty with transitions. The abilities and needs of autistic individuals vary widely, from those who can live independently to those requiring lifelong support. Autism can affect education, employment, and family life, with societal attitudes and available support shaping quality of life. Signs may appear in early childhood, but diagnosis often comes later, many individuals have co-occurring conditions such as epilepsy, anxiety, or with ADHD with the intellectual abilities ranging from severe impairment to above average. NeuroLaunch(2026) mentions that Autism can be viewed in different ways: the medical model sees it as a disorder, the social model highlights societal barriers, and the neurodiversity paradigm recognizes it as a natural neurological difference with unique strengths and challenges.

Statistics

Globally, autism is estimated to affect approximately 1 in 100 people, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023). Based on a world population of roughly 8 billion, this indicates that around 80 million people worldwide are living with autism. Prevalence estimates, however, vary between countries due to differences in diagnostic practices, levels of awareness, and reporting methods.

Autism is diagnosed more frequently in males than in females, a sex difference that is well-documented in research. According to Banerjee(2022), the male-to-female ratio for autism diagnoses is approximately 4:1, meaning that about four males are diagnosed for every one female. However, some studies suggest that autism may be underdiagnosed in females, as they often exhibit different social behaviors or coping strategies that can mask symptoms. As a result, while males receive their diagnosis earlier and often, the true prevalence of autism among females may be higher than reported.

Diagnoses

Autism is diagnosed by specialists such as paediatricians, psychologists, and speech-language pathologists, often following developmental monitoring and screening for delays in communication, behaviour, learning, and motor skills. Tools like the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) and the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) are commonly used, but a single assessment is usually not enough and can be insufficient. A comprehensive evaluation incorporates developmental history, family input, caregiver observations, and input from multiple professionals to fully understand the child's strengths and challenges and guide appropriate interventions (Blue ABA Therapy, 2026).

Autism 360(2026) talks about how a child can get diagnosed. It says diagnosing autism in children involves a multidisciplinary team, including general practitioners, paediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and allied health professionals such as behavioural and occupational therapists. Each professional contributes observations and assessments in their area of expertise, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the child's development, behaviour, communication, and daily functioning. This collaborative approach ensures an accurate diagnosis and helps guide appropriate interventions.

Autism: Many Minds, Many Ways

Identify- Symptoms, differences characteristics

CDC(2026) indicates that individuals that are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often experience difficulties with social communication and interaction. These challenges can manifest early in childhood and include limited eye contact, delayed response to their name, reduced facial expressions, minimal use of gestures, and a lack of interest in sharing objects or engaging in interactive play. As children grow, they may show limited awareness of others' also a limited rage of their emotions, reduced participation in group play, and difficulties with imaginative or pretend play, as well as limited engagement in activities such as singing, dancing, or acting.

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, (2026) States that Autistic individuals are unique, and no single approach can support all people on the spectrum. Each person has a distinct profile of communication styles, behaviors, challenges, needs, and strengths. Despite these individual differences, autistic people can share similarities in their neurology and thinking patterns, which can be generalized into categories. Understanding these commonalities helps explain why autistic individuals may think and behave differently from most others and assists clinicians in conducting accurate autism assessments.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), (2026) says that many individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) show additional characteristics such as delayed language, motor, or cognitive skills, hyperactivity or inattention, medical conditions like epilepsy or gastrointestinal issues, and emotional differences including anxiety, stress, or unusual fear responses. Recognizing these traits helps guide appropriate support and interventions.

Barriers

Sensory challenges are a significant barrier for individuals with autism, as they can involve heightened or reduced sensitivity to sounds, lights, textures, or movement. These difficulties can disrupt learning, social interaction, and daily activities, and they often persist across educational settings, including tertiary education. Sensory modulation issues are recognized in the DSM-5 as a core aspect of autism, emphasizing their importance in understanding the unique needs of autistic individuals. Research into the biological mechanisms underlying sensory hyper- and hypo-responsivity has increased awareness of how these challenges can impact quality of life and participation (Tomchek, 2020). Social communication difficulties can create barriers for individuals with autism, including challenges with eye contact, listening, sharing interests, and engaging in typical conversational give-and-take. These differences stem from neurological variations in processing social information rather than a lack of interest in connecting with others. Such challenges can affect social participation, learning, and forming relationships, yet many autistic individuals also demonstrate strengths, including deep knowledge of specific subjects, excellent memory, and unique ways of engaging with the world (University of Kansas, 2026).



(PNGTree, 2026)

Strategies

Autism Speaks, (2026) expresses that Occupational therapy (OT) helps children with autism manage sensory sensitivities and develop essential daily living and fine motor skills. By addressing challenges such as over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, textures, or lights, OT equips children with coping strategies to navigate their environments more comfortably. Therapists also focus on improving practical skills like dressing, eating, and writing, promoting independence and confidence. Through individualized activities and structured support, OT enhances both functional abilities and quality of life, enabling children to participate more fully at home, at school, and in social settings.

University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, (2026) says that Occupational therapists assess children with autism using standardized tools such as ASD checklists, sensory profiles, and the Childhood Autism Rating Scale, as well as diagnostic criteria from the DSM-5-TR. They observe and evaluate multiple areas, including social interactions, communication, cognitive abilities, sensory responses, and motor skills. This comprehensive assessment allows therapists to identify each child's strengths and challenges and to design individualized interventions that support development, daily functioning, and participation in home, at school, and social environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex condition with diverse social, communicative, sensory, and behavioral differences. Early identification and assessment by multidisciplinary teams are crucial for understanding each individual's strengths and challenges. Barriers such as sensory sensitivities and social communication difficulties can affect learning, social participation, and quality of life, while interventions like occupational therapy help promote independence and engagement. Recognizing both the unique profiles and common characteristics of autistic individuals is essential for providing effective support and improving outcomes across educational and daily life contexts.