



PATIENT  
EDUCATION

# Autism in Children and Adolescents

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# What is autism?

Autism is a disorder related to the neurodevelopmental development of a child. It affects:

- social interaction
- verbal and non-verbal communication
- behavior

While it is usually diagnosed around 16 months of age or even before, some children are diagnosed at an older age.

# How common is autism?

- Autism is a common disorder. One child out of 150 might have autism. However, no figures exist for Lebanon.
- It is more frequent in boys than in girls.

# What causes autism?

- The exact cause of autism is still unknown.
- Some evidence links autism to problems with the function or structure of the brain.
- What we do know is that heredity, vaccines, and food allergies do not cause autism.

# How do you recognize autism?

## Social Interaction

**The child has difficulty with:**

- using non-verbal behaviors (eye-gazes, facial expressions, body postures and gestures)
- forming relationships with peers
- seeking out others to share enjoyment and interests
- sharing emotional and social feelings with others

## Communication

**The child has difficulty with:**

- developing spoken language (delay in speech); some autistic children develop odd or strange language.
- starting or maintaining a conversation
- playing imaginary games or social imitative play

## Behavior

### The child has:

- restricted interests and activities.
- preoccupation with one interest.
- specific routines or rituals that do not serve any purpose.
- stereotyped or repetitive motor movements such as hand or finger flapping or twisting, or whole body movements.

# How is autism diagnosed?

### To diagnose your child with autism, the doctor will do the following:

- Ask you questions about the period before and after your child was born and questions about the medical history of your family.
- Do a complete physical and mental examination of your child.
- Possibly order a few tests for your child, such as a brain MRI.

# Can autism be treated?

- There is no medication that cures autism. There are medications that can help reduce the symptoms such as aggressive behavior, mood swings, hyperactivity, inattention, anxiety, repetitive behavior and sleep problems.
- In most patients, improvement or a decrease in symptoms can be expected with therapy.
- The best way is to have a comprehensive and individualized treatment plan that corresponds to the child's needs, and to the parents' ability to engage and be active partners.
- The goal of the plan is to help the child adapt to his environment and to have a dignified life. The plan includes family members, early nursery, school, and a team of specialists.
- The team of specialists includes a pediatric neurologist or psychiatrist, a psychologist, applied behavior analysis therapist, and speech, occupational and psychomotor therapists. This team helps the child educationally, behaviorally, cognitively, socially and emotionally.

# Tips for parents:

- Learn more about autism.  
Do not listen to common myths or misconceptions about the disease.
- Try to know more about your child's symptoms and his/her strengths and weaknesses.
- Be involved with your child's teachers and team of specialists in developing the treatment plan.
- Be consistent with your child.
- Let your child follow a daily schedule or routine as much as possible (such as when to eat, when to go to therapy, when to sleep, etc.).
- Praise your child for his/her good behavior.

This educational material provides general information only.  
It does not constitute medical advice. Consult your health care provider to determine whether the information applies to you.