

# Autism in adults

## What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong condition which is part of a group of difficulties known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This means that although there are similarities between people with autism each person is unique. Whilst some people with autism are able to maintain employment and complete university studies others require specialist support throughout their life.

## What's causing autism?

Autism is caused by abnormalities in the development and functioning of the brain. However, the exact causes of autism are unknown but it is considered that a combination of hereditary, physical and environmental factors may be responsible for changes in brain development. It is not caused by person's upbringing or their social circumstances.

It is estimated that autism is affecting more than 1 in 100 individuals (around 700,000 people with autism in the UK) with men being more likely to have autism compared to women.

## What are the characteristics of autism?

The main difficulties encountered by people with autism are represented by problems with:

- Social communication (understanding other people's gestures, facial expressions or taking certain verbal expressions literally)
- Interacting and relating to people socially

which can leave them isolated (struggling to make and maintain relationships, not understanding social rules)

- Making sense of the world around them (finding changes to their routine difficult, struggling to understand other people thoughts, feelings or actions and to predict their responses)

People with autism can also find difficult to cope with changes to their usual routine, they can have special interests and can experience changes to their sensory sensitivity (they can be over or under sensitive to one or more senses). Approximately 10% of people with autism may have special skills and abilities.

Asperger syndrome is a form of autism in which people can have average or above average intelligence and have no delays in their language development. They could find however difficult to understand social communication, social interaction and imagination.

## Diagnostic stage: referral and assessment

Some children with autism become adults without ever being diagnosed. Having a diagnosis of autism established by a specialist clinician can help people with autism and their families to get a better understanding of autism difficulties and enables them to access helpful resources.

If you or someone you know think that you might have an Autism Spectrum Disorder

you can contact your General Practitioner (GP) who can refer you to a team of professionals including clinical psychologists and psychiatrists who have experience in diagnosing autism.

Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust provides assessments to establish if people with a learning disability also have autism.

To confirm or exclude a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome you can refer yourself to Outlook Southwest by accessing the online referral form at [www.outlooksw.co.uk/asperger-syndrome](http://www.outlooksw.co.uk/asperger-syndrome).

### Support post diagnosis

Unfortunately autism it's not a condition that you can cure or grow out of but people with autism and their families can be helped in many ways. Help includes:

- Being given information about the condition
- Support with managing difficult behaviour
- Development of social communication and emotional skills
- Medication

Usually, there will be several people involved in the care of an adult with autism, such as a speech and language therapist, psychologist, occupational therapist, nurse and specialist support worker. Approximately 1 in 3 people with autism have severe mental health problems and seeing a psychiatrist is an essential part of their care.

Caring for people diagnosed with autism can be very rewarding but it can also be challenging at times. Carers of people with autism can request a carer's assessment which would inform the level of personal support they require from specialist services.

### Further information and help

#### National Autistic Society

A wealth of information on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

#### Autism Services Directory

A range of useful resources for people with autism in Cornwall and nationwide including advice and support with education, finding and keeping employment, finances, dealing with social relationships, marriage and parenthood.

[www.autism.org.uk/directory](http://www.autism.org.uk/directory)

#### Autism Resources in Cornwall

Useful resources in Cornwall for adults with autism and their families are available from Cornwall Council.

[www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/autism](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/autism)

[www.naswestcornwall.co.uk/support](http://www.naswestcornwall.co.uk/support)

#### Autism Helpline

For any other advice and support including the details of independent specialists in diagnosis of autism.

**Autism Helpline on 0808 800 4104 (open Monday-Friday, 10 am - 4 pm)**