

What is the Autism Spectrum?

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Autism Spectrum refers to a continuum of severity or developmental impairment. Children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) usually have particular communication, social and behavioural characteristics in common, but the conditions cover a wide spectrum, with individual differences in:

- Number and kinds of symptoms, severity: mild to severe
- Age of onset
- Levels of functioning
- Challenges with social interactions

There are five Autism Spectrum Disorders described under the diagnostic category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). Three of the most common are: Autistic Disorder (AD), also called autism or classic autism, PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified) and, Asperger's Disorder (AD), also called Asperger's Syndrome (AS) and Asperger. Also, two less common disorders: Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and Rett's Syndrome.

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Autistic Disorder	Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)	Asperger's Syndrome (AS)	Rett's Syndrome (RS)	Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes called "classic" autism - Typically children shows no, or very limited, verbal/nonverbal skills - Absence of social or emotional reciprocity - Absence of imaginative play - Failure to develop or to seek peer relationships - Usually demonstrate repetitive stereotypic behaviours, such as rocking, playing with string, visually tracking objects, spinning objects - Strong adherence to nonfunctional routines or rituals - Associated with cognitive delay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impairments in reciprocal social interactions, verbal communication and stereotyped behaviours, but do not meet full criteria - Traditionally, seen as milder form of autism - Is a diagnosis by exclusion of other disorders in autistic spectrum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Usually have normal language for first few years – utilizing single words by age 2 and phases by age 3 - Present with clinical impairments in social interactions and repetitive and restricted behaviours i.e. obsessive interest, perseverant on one topic - Poor social or emotional reciprocity - Normal or near normal IQ - Usually have excellent rote memory ability - Usually clumsy, lack a sense of humour and have high anxiety - Strong adherence to nonfunctional routines or rituals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rare - Occurs only in girls - Normal head size at birth and normal development - Between 1 – 2 years of age, head growth slows, develop stereotypic hand movements - Poor coordination and social withdrawal occurs - Develop severe impairments in expressive and receptive language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rare - Normal development till at least 24 months of age - Onset usually between 36 – 48 months of age, but can occur up to the age of ten - Rapid neurodevelopment regression resulting in autistic symptoms - Signs are loss of previously normal language, cognitive and play skills, deterioration of self-help skills and development of stereotyped behaviours - More common in boys than in girls



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References

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- Sicile-Kira, C. (2004). *Autism spectrum disorders: The complete guide to understanding autism, asperger's syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder, and other ASDs*. New York, NY: Berkley Publishing Group.