

What is an Autism spectrum disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that affects social interaction, communication, interests and behaviour. It includes Asperger syndrome and childhood autism. Some people also use the term autism spectrum condition or 'neurodiverse' (as opposed to people without autism being 'neurotypical').

The main features of ASD typically start to develop in childhood, although the impact of these may not be apparent until there is a significant change in the person's life, such as a change of school. In the UK, it's estimated that about one in every 100 people has ASD.

There is no 'cure' for ASD, but a wide range of treatments - including education and behaviour support - can help people with the condition.

What are the signs and symptoms?

ASD can cause a wide range of symptoms, which are often grouped into two main categories:

- **Problems with social interaction and communication** - including problems understanding and being aware of other people's emotions and feelings; it can also include delayed language development and an inability to start conversations or take part in them properly.
- **Restricted and repetitive patterns of thought, interests and physical behaviours** - including making repetitive physical movements, such as hand tapping or twisting, and becoming upset if these set routines are disrupted.

Information adapted from: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Autistic-spectrum-disorder/Pages/Introduction.aspx>