

# **Toddlers to teenagers: Long-term follow-up study of outcomes in autism spectrum disorder**

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In this study, we examined the developmental changes over time of adolescents diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in toddlerhood. We also searched for characteristics of the children at toddlerhood that predicted their outcomes at adolescence. Our study included 65 adolescents who were divided into two groups: a low cognitive (LC) group with an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score of less than 85 points (comprising 41 young people), and a high cognitive (HC) group with an IQ score equal to or higher than 85 points (comprising 21 young people). The adolescents underwent a comprehensive assessment to determine their cognitive ability, their adaptive skills (i.e., daily living skills, communication skills and social skills) and the severity of their autism. Significant differences in the presentations of the young people, and in how these presentations changed over time, were found between the high and low cognitive groups. At toddlerhood, the HC group had significantly less severe social-communication difficulties. Only the HC group showed a decrease in social-communication difficulties over time. Although the two groups did not differ in their adaptive skills at the time of diagnosis, the HC group had better adaptive skills at adolescence. Better adaptive communication skills in toddlerhood were associated with better outcome at adolescence in relation to cognitive ability, adaptive skills and autism symptoms. Fewer problems with social affect and better cognitive ability at time of diagnosis predicted higher cognitive level and adaptive skills at adolescence. The current study points to the important role of the cognitive potential of individuals with ASD with regards to long term outcomes. In addition, comprehensive evaluations at toddlerhood can strongly predict later outcomes (in adolescence).