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Autism Factsheet

About Autism

Although it was first identified in 1943, autism is still a relatively unknown disability. Yet autism spectrum disorders are estimated to touch the lives of over 500,000 families throughout the UK.

People with autism are not physically disabled in the same way that a person with cerebral palsy may be; they do not require wheelchairs and they 'look' just like anybody without the disability. Due to this invisible nature it can be much harder to create awareness and understanding of the condition. Because an autistic child looks 'normal' others assume they are naughty or the parents are not controlling the child. Strangers frequently comment on this 'failing'.

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. Children and adults with autism have difficulties with everyday social interaction. Their ability to develop friendships is generally limited as is their capacity to understand other people's emotional expression.

People with autism can often have accompanying learning disabilities but everyone with the condition shares a difficulty in making sense of the world.

There is also a condition called Asperger syndrome, which is a form of autism used to describe people who are usually at the higher functioning end of the autism spectrum.

What are the characteristics of Autism?

People with autism generally experience three main areas of difficulty; these are known as the triad of impairments:

- * **Social interaction** (difficulty with social relationships, for example appearing aloof and indifferent to other people)
- * **Social communication** (difficulty with verbal and non-verbal communication, for example not fully understanding the meaning of common gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice)
- * **Social imagination** (difficulty in the development of interpersonal play and imagination, for example having a limited range of imaginative activities, possibly copied and pursued rigidly and repetitively).

In addition to this, repetitive behaviour patterns and resistance to change in routine are often characteristic.

What are the causes of Autism?

The exact cause or causes of autism is/are still not known but research shows that genetic factors are important. It is also evident from research that autism may be associated with a variety of conditions affecting brain development which occur before, during, or very soon after birth.

Diagnosis and Treatment

The earlier a diagnosis of autism is made, the better the chances are of a person receiving appropriate help and support. Specialist education and structured support can really make a difference to the life of a person with autism, helping to maximise skills and achieve full potential in adulthood.

There is a wide range of views on the best way to treat people with autism. Some approaches are based on very specific theories as to the possible causes of autism spectrum disorders. A full range of interventions is available from the autism charities listed below.

Organisations

The National Autistic Society (NAS)

The National Autistic Society champions the rights and interests of all people with autism and aims to provide individuals with autism and their families with help, support and services which can make a positive difference to their lives.

Address: 393 City Road, London, EC1V 1NG
Autism Helpline: 0845 070 4004 (information, advice and support)
Tel: 020 7833 2299
Fax: 020 7833 9666
Email: nas@nas.org.uk and autismhelpline@nas.org.uk
Website: <http://www.autism.org.uk>



Research Autism

Research Autism is a UK charity which is exclusively dedicated to research into interventions in autism.

Address: Church House, Church Road, Filton, Bristol BS34 7BD
Tel: 020 8292 8900
Email: info@researchautism.net
Website: <http://www.researchautism.net>

Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks raises funds for research into the causes of autism, to improve the quality of life for those living with this confusing and isolating condition.

Address: North Lea House, 66 Northfield End, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG9 2BE
Tel: 01491 412311
Email: info@autismspeaks.org.uk
Website: <http://www.autismspeaks.org.uk>

Autism Independent UK

Autism Independent UK aims to increase awareness of autism, together with well established and newly developed approaches in the diagnosis, assessment, education and treatment.

Address: 199-203 Blandford Ave, Kettering, Northants. NN16 9AT

Tel: 01536 523274

Email: autism@autismuk.com

Website: <http://www.autismuk.com>

TreeHouse

TreeHouse is a national charity set up by a group of parents in 1997 to focus on autism education. Its aim is to transform through education the lives of children with autism and the lives of their families.

Address: Woodside Avenue, London, N10 3JA

Tel: 020 8815 5444

Email: info@treehouse.org.uk

Website: <http://www.treehouse.org.uk>

Pyramid Educational Consultants UK

This company provides PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System - which is shown in Community Channel's programme, What Can Science Do for Me - Autism? Pyramid provides high quality training, consultation and support to parents, carers and professionals involved with children and adults with communication difficulties.

Address: Pavilion House, 6/7 Old Steine, Brighton BN1 1EJ

Tel: 01273 609555

Fax: 01273 609556

Email: pyramid@pecs.org.uk

Website: <http://www.pecs.org.uk>

The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust was established in 1936 and is an independent charity funding research to improve human and animal health. It is the UK's largest non-governmental source of funds for biomedical research.

Address: Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

Tel: 020 7611 8888

Fax 020 7611 8545

Email: contact@wellcome.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/>

Community Channel

Community Channel is a not-for-profit, free to air television channel in the UK launched in September 2000. Owned by the Media Trust, a registered charity, its remit is to give a voice to community groups, charities of all sizes and not-for-profit organizations through using news, current affairs, documentaries and lifestyle programming.

Web: <http://www.communitychannel.org/>

Tel: 08708 505500

Email: info@communitychannel.org

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www.communitychannel.org info@communitychannel.org