

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/conhp)



## Autism Awareness

### Introduction

Autism is defined as a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, and speech and nonverbal communication. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that each individual has a variable level of social or developmental delay. A child may be highly skilled or face severe challenges. Autism Spectrum Disorder includes 4 subtypes: Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Previously, each of the disorders were their own category until 2013 when the American Psychiatric Association grouped them into one umbrella condition. In the United States alone, more than 3.5 million Americans have been diagnosed with Autism. The prevalence of Autism has increased by 119.4% from 2000 to 2010, becoming the

fastest growing developmental disability in the United States.

### Risk Factors

There is no specific cause of Autism, but scientists have been able to link some potential risk factors. Male children are 4 times more likely to receive a diagnosis of Autism compared to women. Family history may also be a risk factor. Those families who already have a child diagnosed have an increased risk for other children to develop this

disorder. Babies born prior to 26 weeks of gestation have increased risk of developing Autism. The age of the parents may also play a role. Older parents have a higher incidence of having children with Autism than those who have children at a younger age. Within the last decade it has been believed that vaccinations are one of the causes of Autism. However, there has been an abundant amount of research which suggests there is no link between the two.

### Diagnosis

Your child's primary care physician will be checking for signs of developmental delays during regular checkups. If your doctor notices any concerns you will likely be referred to a specialist, such as a child psychiatrist or psychologist for a more in depth evaluation. Because Autism is a spectrum disorder, the variability in the signs and symptoms may make a



diagnosis hard. There is no specific medical test done to diagnose a child with Autism. Instead, the specialist may observe your child and ask about their social skills and how their behavior has developed over time.

### **Treatment**

There is no cure for Autism but the earlier a child is diagnosed and receives treatment the better their outcomes will be. Early treatment allows children to better integrate into school and may help prevent developmental delays. There is no specific treatment for Autism but many different type of therapies may be used. Behavior (including OT) and communication therapies can address the range of social, language and behavioral difficulties associated with this disorder. Highly structured education programs are typically beneficial for this population. Speech therapy may also be needed for those children who have language and communication problems. No medications are directly associated to help with Autism specifically but there are medications that can help control related symptoms.

### **Autism Awareness Month**

The month of April is designated as Autism

Awareness month. April 2<sup>nd</sup> is specifically used as international Autism Awareness Day. During this month, you may find several places decorated in a light blue to bring awareness for this population. Here in Arkansas, there are several events being hosted by different Autism awareness groups. The Arkansas Autism Foundation in hosting their annual festival and walk Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup> in Little Rock and an Awareness night with the Arkansas Travelers on Monday April 26<sup>th</sup>. The Arkansas Autism Resource Outreach Center in hosting a day at the Little Rock Zoo on May 4<sup>th</sup>. More information about these events can be found on each foundations website.

### **Tips on Working with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum**

When working with individuals with Autism it is important to remember that each person is different and they all have their own strengths and weaknesses. Some individuals may lack organizational skills. To help improve this, support strategies such as a written checklist and reminders can be extremely helpful. When making or changing plans, make them gradually and allow time for the individual to adapt. These individuals may need more motivational reinforcements when learning

a new skill. Try not to overwhelm them and learn what things might pose as triggers. It is important to remember that there are potential sensory issues in different environments.

### **References**

- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>
- <http://www.autism-society.org>
- <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/arkansas-autism-foundation-12994598883>
- <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352928>
- <http://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/autism-through-the-lifespan/adulthood/employment/tips-working-individuals-autism-spectrum/>

### **Other News**

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Kayla Leal, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.