

Autism: Know the Signs

Over the past several decades, there has been a noticeable increase in the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) among children and adults. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately **1 in 36 children in the U.S.** are affected by ASD, as are more than **2% of adults**.

This rise in cases has sparked a growing awareness of the importance of early detection and intervention. Recognizing the signs of ASD is crucial to provide timely support. Common indicators can range from repetitive behaviors, sensory sensitivities and delayed developmental milestones to more subtle signs such as social awkwardness. It is essential to be vigilant in observing these signs and seeking professional evaluation if concerns arise.

Some of the more common signs of ASD in children include:

Delayed Milestones

- Delays in reaching developmental milestones, such as crawling, walking or talking
- Regression in skills, such as loss of language or social abilities

Social Challenges

- Difficulty with eye contact and maintaining conversations
- Limited interest in sharing emotions or experiences with others
- Difficulty forming and maintaining friendships
- Limited interest in playing or engaging with peers
- Preference for solitary activities over group interactions

Communication Differences

- Delayed speech development or lack of interest in communicating
- Repetitive language patterns, such as echolalia — the repetition of words just spoken by another person
- Difficulty understanding non-verbal communication, like gestures or facial expressions

Repetitive Behaviors

- Engaging in repetitive movements or activities, such as hand-flapping or rocking
- Insistence on sameness or resistance to change in routines
- Intense focus on specific topics or objects

Sensory Sensitivities

- Overreacting or underreacting to sensory stimuli (e.g., lights, sounds, textures)
- Unusual fascination with certain sensory experiences (e.g., smelling objects, touching textures)

Intense Interests

- Fixation on specific, narrow interests with an obsessive focus
- Difficulty shifting attention away from these interests

Lack of Imaginative Play

- Limited ability to engage in pretend play or imaginative activities
- Difficulty understanding or participating in make-believe scenarios

Unusual Emotional Responses

- Atypical emotional reactions, such as inappropriate laughter or crying
- Challenges expressing and understanding emotions

If your child shows signs of autism, talk to their pediatrician. Early, frequent screening is important. Your provider may refer your child to a psychologist for additional testing. Call your health plan for help finding an appointment that meets your needs.

#AutismChampions

If you think you or your child may have autism, visit Lucet's Autism Resource Center ([LucetHealth.com/autism-resource-center](https://www.LucetHealth.com/autism-resource-center)) for helpful information about obtaining a diagnosis and treatment.