



Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Aetna Better Health® of Texas



What is autism spectrum disorder?

Autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disorder. Symptoms generally appear in the first two years of life. Autism may not be recognized or diagnosed until much later. It can be diagnosed at any age.

A person with autism has a brain that works differently. The way they respond to things may be different. It can affect the way a person gets along and communicates with others. It can affect how a person behaves. It can make it difficult for a person to do the things that others do easily. People with autism can be very sensitive to certain things.

Autism can affect someone a little, a lot, or somewhere in between. The term 'high functioning' means mild challenges. 'Low functioning' means a person has severe challenges. That's why it's called a 'spectrum' disorder. The challenges of autism affect people in different ways. The symptoms vary from person to person.

Some children with ASD may:

- Not act like other children their own age
- Prefer to be alone
- Not make eye contact
- Not like touching or hugging people
- Not speak
- Have trouble saying their thoughts and feelings
- Communicate without words, like using pictures or sign language
- Always want things the same way
- Get upset when something changes
- Repeat words, actions and certain movements (such as flapping)
- React strongly to certain sounds or noises
- React strongly to the way things feel, like clothes or food
- Not be able to show feelings, like being happy
- Not understand when someone is angry or in pain

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can get help. Behavioral health services can help children and their families with the challenges of autism. This is important to Aetna Better Health of Texas. We make sure our providers do the things that are proven to work. We want our providers to help improve a person's whole health.

Getting started

Every child should receive well-child checkups with a pediatrician or an early childhood health care provider. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children be checked for developmental delays at 9-, 18-, and 24- or 30-month well-child visits. They recommend checking for autism at 18- and 24-month well-child visits. Additional evaluation might be needed if a child is at high risk for ASD or developmental problems.

Children at high risk include those who:

- Have a family member with ASD
- Have some ASD symptoms
- Have older parents
- Have certain genetic conditions
- Were born at a very low birth weight

Who can diagnose autism spectrum disorder?

If you feel your loved one or child may have ASD, you can see a professional. Your primary care doctor/pediatrician can refer you to a provider who does evaluations for ASD. Make an appointment. Talk about your concerns.



Initial intake appointment and assessment

At this appointment, the provider will gather information. They will get it from you and your child. They may ask you to help get information from other providers, people who help your child, or your child's school. They may want to speak with family members.

Bring any information you may have about your child's family, educational, behavioral and medical history. You should bring a list of current medicines your child is taking. All of these things will help the team. It will make it easier for them to quickly provide the right care. They'll coordinate care and develop an Individual Service Plan (ISP) for your child.

What help is available for autism spectrum disorder?

There are many services for children, teens and adults with autism spectrum disorder. The services are based on their individual needs. Ask your providers which of these services will help. Ask how the service is provided and how it is expected to help.

Possible services include:

- Comprehensive and Focused Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)
- High-needs case management
- Direct support services (including rehabilitation services)
- Psychiatric services
- Individual and family therapy
- Specialty treatment
- Respite care
- Family support



Questions?

If you have any questions about ASD, or what Aetna Better Health of Texas can do to help you or your child, call the Member Services phone number on your child's ID card and ask to speak with a Case Manager. We want to walk through this journey with you.

