



BrainWave Centre

Objective Measurement...
Confident Management

INFORMATION Sheet

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are lifelong and persistent disorders that have serious influences on every aspect of a person's family and community life. Included in the ASD are Autism and Asperger's Disorder.

Autism is a developmental disorder caused by a dysfunction of the central nervous system. It directly affects the way information is absorbed through the senses and interpreted by the brain. It impairs the way a person understands the world and what is happening. There is no single known cause of Autism Spectrum Disorder but there are recognised contributing factors including genetic components, exposure to viral diseases/infections, physical trauma and metabolic disorders. Poor parenting or lack of love does not cause Autism. There is also no direct cure for Autism. Improvement in one's ability and behaviour may occur over time with treatment. Some individuals show remarkable improvement throughout their lives through behavioural modification and support.

Features of Autistic Disorder:

- A display of repetitive/restricted behaviours and interests
- There is great difficulty communicating with the outside world
- There is erratic social interaction which may include self-isolating, uninhibited behaviours and aggression
- There is often feelings of anxiety, frustration and confusion when faced with the demands of everyday life

These experiences range in severity and are measured on a scale from low to high functioning.

Features of Asperger's Disorder:

- People who have Asperger's are usually able to communicate more freely than people with autism, however often appear to be insensitive to the feelings of others
- People who have Asperger's have great difficulty interpreting the facial and body expression of other people, which leads to much confusion in communicating
- Patients with Asperger's exhibit restricted and repetitive behaviour, interests and activities, and often need a routine or schedule to be set for every aspect of their daily life

Differences between Autism and Asperger's Disorders:

- Children with Asperger's can exhibit any of the normal range of intellectual ability
- Asperger's sufferers have no delay in speech development however speech is rarely used conversationally
- Children and adults with Asperger's can become obsessed by one object, while this is not the case with Autism

Diagnosis and Treatment of ASD

Assessment is best conducted by a group of professionals, which includes speech pathologists, psychologists, GP, Paediatricians, teachers and optometrists. Early diagnosis is best so that early intervention and treatment can occur. Treatment is aimed at improving communication and social skills, developing meaningful play and stopping repetitive activities.

This can be done in a number of ways. Some are more effective than others.

- Medications are of limited use. Certain medications may help with concentration, but have negative side-effects such as increasing repetitive behaviours and obsessions and increasing withdrawal and moodiness.
- Drug-free treatment can be successful in managing the disorder. Changes to diet to reflect increase intake of vitamin B12, magnesium and omega 3 may also help.
- Psychological/behavioural therapies and other interventions such as neurofeedback are beneficial in restoring quality of life to sufferers. Neurofeedback is an option if intensive treatment can be afforded.
- Treatments should focus on establishing routine and order to the autistic child's life. This can be achieved through the use of a personalised story book to communicate simple everyday tasks.

As with many other behavioural conditions that are life long afflictions, the best approach in the reliable diagnosis, treatment and management is a multidisciplinary one. There are no quick fixes.