



## PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

### Asperger's Syndrome

#### Topic Overview

##### What is Asperger's syndrome?

[Asperger's syndrome](#) is a developmental disorder in which people have severe difficulties understanding how to interact socially.

People with Asperger's syndrome have some traits of [autism](#), especially weak social skills and a preference for sameness and routine. But unlike those with autism, children with Asperger's syndrome usually start to talk around 2 years of age (the age at which speech normally develops). They have normal to above-normal intelligence.

Both conditions belong to the group of disorders called [pervasive developmental disorders](#). As many as 3 out of every 10,000 people have Asperger's syndrome.<sup>1</sup>

##### What causes Asperger's syndrome?

The exact cause of Asperger's syndrome is not known. It tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic link, although scientists have not discovered a distinct genetic marker.

##### What are the symptoms?

Children with Asperger's syndrome typically develop a good to excellent vocabulary, although they usually lack the social instincts and practical skills needed when relating to others. They may not recognize verbal and nonverbal cues or understand social norms, such as taking turns talking or grasping the concept of personal space. They may have difficulties with accent, tone, and pitch, which can make their speech sometimes odd or difficult to understand. And they may have difficulty expressing their own feelings and perceiving others' feelings. Children with Asperger's typically make efforts to establish friendships, but they may have difficulty making friends because of their social awkwardness.

Children with Asperger's syndrome often have limited and very focused interests. They are often most comfortable with fixed routines and dislike change. They may lack coordination, exhibit unusual facial expressions, body postures, and gestures, and be somewhat clumsy. Many children with Asperger's syndrome also have trouble with fine motor skills, such as handwriting.

Children with Asperger's syndrome will have some of the traits typical of the syndrome. But each child with Asperger's presents a different picture; some will have less pronounced traits, while others' traits are more noticeable. Each child will have individual interests, likes, and dislikes. All children with Asperger's syndrome have severe trouble in social situations.

##### How is Asperger's syndrome diagnosed?

Asperger's syndrome is usually not diagnosed until a child is at least 3 years old, when social problems become apparent, although it may be diagnosed earlier. A diagnosis is based on a careful history of the child's development, psychological and psychiatric assessments, communication tests, and the parents' and clinicians' shared observations.

Asperger's syndrome is diagnosed using specific criteria, published in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*.

### **How is it treated?**

Treatment for Asperger's syndrome should be tailored to meet individual needs. Communication and social skills training is usually recommended. Behavior management, in which good behavior is rewarded, can help change problem behaviors, such as interrupting and dominating conversations.

Medications for Asperger's syndrome are generally avoided, especially in young children, but may be recommended for specific symptoms, such as [depression](#). Medication for depression may be recommended for adolescents with Asperger's syndrome.

Federal law requires public schools to provide appropriate educational services for people with Asperger's between the ages of 3 and 21. Contact your local school district to find out which services are available for your child.

### **How are families affected?**

Parents of children with Asperger's syndrome face many challenges in raising children with special needs. They may have difficulty finding health professionals who are knowledgeable about this uncommon condition. Additionally, overtaxed teachers may not be able to offer the kind of help parents know their children need at school.

Many children with Asperger's syndrome have other coexisting conditions, such as [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) (ADHD), [anxiety disorder](#), [obsessive-compulsive disorder](#) (OCD), [social anxiety disorder](#), or [depression](#). These conditions also complicate a parent's job. Many parents find comfort and build acceptance with help from support groups, counseling, and a network of friends, family, and community.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Learning about Asperger's syndrome:**

- [What is Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [What causes Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [What are the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [Who is affected by Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [What is a pervasive developmental disorder?](#)
- [What is nonverbal learning disorder, and how is it similar to Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [Do vaccines cause Asperger's syndrome?](#)

#### **Being diagnosed:**

- [Who can diagnose Asperger's syndrome?](#)
- [How is Asperger's syndrome diagnosed?](#)
- [Are there screening tests for developmental disorders?](#)

#### **Getting treatment:**

- [How is Asperger's syndrome treated?](#)
- [What steps can parents take to help a child with Asperger's](#)

## [syndrome?](#)

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Author: [Sabra L. Katz-Wise](#)

Last Updated: [May 4, 2006](#)

Medical Review: [Michael J. Sexton, MD - Pediatrics](#)  
[Fred Volkmar, MD - Child Psychiatry](#)

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