

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

## What is it?

Autism spectrum disorder (autism for short) affects how someone thinks, feels, acts and behaves with others. Signs can start as early as a few months after birth. Many children show signs by age three. Autism affects around one in 100 children.

The causes aren't fully known yet, but there is no link to vaccinations. Early treatment and a future care plan will help support your child's health in the best way. It is key to giving your child support and care early to prevent things from getting worse in the future.

## What will my GP do now?

Your GP may refer you for diagnosis of autism. This may be with a paediatrician or a developmental psychologist. Once diagnosed, your GP may talk to you about what this means for your child and your family. They may give you tools and supports to help you learn more. Early treatment gives the best long-term results. Your GP may also check your child's health. They may manage any issues such as sleep patterns, diet and toilet habits. Your GP may refer you to allied health to support your child, such as occupational therapy, speech therapy and physiotherapy.

## What will my GP do in the future?

Your GP may play a key role in your child's health and care plan. They may see your child often to make sure their health is fine and treat any issues. They may partner with other health workers and keep up to date with any treatments your child has. If you need more help or advice, they may refer you to local parent support groups.

## What questions could I ask my doctor?

- Who can I speak to for help?
- What specialists should my child see?
- Who do I call if I am struggling?



## What can I do?

Follow your GP's advice about getting tests done as soon as you can. Always be patient with your child. How they behave is not their fault and they can't always control their actions. Look after your child's health.

Make sure you are taking care of your own health as well. If you are finding it hard to cope, tell your GP. They may be able to refer you to a local support group, or refer you for counselling.

Give your child and yourself time to adjust to new treatment plans and routines. Ask your GP about respite care (when a carer looks after your child). Respite care can give you a break.

## What supports are available?

### NDIS

The NDIS funds supports to assist people with autism. Ask your GP for more information.

### Private specialists

Private specialists, called paediatricians, are also an option. Your GP can refer you.

## Where can I learn more?

- **Better Health Channel** – Autism Spectrum Disorder (Autism): [betterhealth.vic.gov.au](https://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- **The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne** – Autism Spectrum Disorder: [rch.org.au](https://rch.org.au)