

WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is part of the Autism Spectrum Disorder. It is a neurodevelopmental disorder, manifesting as behavioural deficits. However, it is important to remember that the behaviours are due to an impairment in the development or function of the brain. We now know from our knowledge of brain plasticity that this can be redressed if we optimise the nutrient levels in the brain and push the brain to strengthen existing connections or make new ones through early intensive intervention.

Autism can affect a child's functioning in several areas:

- Social communication
- Language
- Attention deficits
- Restrictive and repetitive behaviours
- Emotion regulation
- Learning difficulties
- Physical and health issues

Social communication in Autism

- Problems with speaking and listening
- Difficulty reading facial expressions
- Difficulty interpreting and understanding feelings
- Non-responsiveness to smiles, gestures and physical affection
- Non-responsive to his/her name or familiar voices
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of eye contact

Restrictive and Repetitive Behaviours in Autism

- Fussiness with food and clothes
- Difficulties trying new foods
- Obsessive interests
- Lack of curiosity and imagination
- Inflexibility and need for routine
- Rocking, flapping, walking on tip-toes and tics
- Odd or peculiar behaviours

Emotional Regulation in Autism

- Anxiety
- Temper tantrums
- Easily frustrated and hitting out
- Emotional or angry outbursts
- Sensory overloads
- Flat, depressed mood
- Poor motivation

Attentional difficulties

Almost every child with Autism has Attention Deficit Disorder. The DSM-V now allows for this dual diagnosis. The exception is a smaller subtype of high functioning children who hyperfocus on activities of interest, at the detriment of other activities; they are usually perfectionists who have

high anxiety and may refuse to attempt new tasks for fear of failure.

Learning Difficulties in Autism

We believe that in order to learn, the child first needs to pay attention. Hence it is vital that the attention system be addressed first.

- Difficulty predicting consequences of actions
- Difficulty imitating actions, a necessary early step to learning
- Doesn't follow objects visually ((poor joint attention)
- Takes longer to learn new tasks compared to peers
- Difficulties learning to read and write
- Difficulties learning new words

Physical and Health Issues

The lack of optimum nutrient levels, and toxins in our food chain affect the integrity of cells leading to dysfunction in various system. These in turn lead to:

- Digestive issues, such as food intolerances
- Asthma, eczema, glue ears
- Leaky gut (increased intestinal permeability)
- Irritable bowel syndrome, chronic constipation requiring medication
- Sleep disturbances, such as:
- Difficulties falling asleep, frequent awakenings, restless sleep
- Nightmares and night terrors

Please seek professional advice if your child demonstrates any of these behaviours or health symptoms. Typically developing healthy children can at times demonstrate some of these symptoms. Hence, it is most important to seek expert health professional assistance for a correct diagnosis of the causes. Consider getting a second opinion and do not accept the opinion of any health professional who suggests that these health symptoms are typical of children with ASD and who either ignore your concerns or use medication to address the symptoms only. You need to find a health professional who will investigate the underlying causes and treat these, not just provide temporary relief of symptoms.