

What is Autism?

Autism is a complex neuro-developmental disorder that is seen in children from 18 months to three years of age. It affects the child's communication, socialization and cognition. If the children with autism receive early intervention they may improve remarkably and many of them may go to the mainstream schools.

Autism in Pakistan

There are no reliable data for the prevalence of autism in Pakistan. In the US population autism is seen in about one in sixty children and its incidence is on the rise. The statistics from South Asia estimate that the disorder may be as common in Pakistan as it is elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately most of these children remain undiagnosed due to the lack of awareness and expertise in diagnosis. The parents often suffer silently and perhaps more unfortunate are the affected children who have to bear the brunt of the disorder and being mishandled.

Symptoms of Autism

Depending on the severity of symptoms, autism may be divided in to mild moderate or severe forms. Children with mild autism may have only a few of the classical symptoms while the severely affected children may have most or all of the following features of autism:

- Poor or no eye contact
- Failure to respond to commands or one's own name being called
- Little or no speech or repeats words or phrases (echolalia)
- Failure to point and pulling others to draw attention towards objects of interest
- Difficulty in mixing with other children
- Resists change and likes sameness
- Repetitive body movements like hand flapping and rocking
- Inappropriate laughing or crying
- Throws tantrums
- May show aggression to others or self
- Spins objects
- Inappropriate play e.g. the child may continuously spin the wheels of a toy car rather than pushing it or may line up toys or other objects
- No fear of danger
- Walking on toes
- Failure to imitate