



Health & Wellness

April is Autism Awareness Month

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause for autism, but increased awareness and funding can help families today.



THE BASICS

Autism is treatable. Children do not "outgrow" autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes.

Some signs of autism include:

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g. hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects

The demands of living with a person with autism are great, and families frequently experience high levels of stress. Recognizing and preparing for the challenges will make a tremendous difference to all involved, including parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family and friends.

The uniqueness of each individual with autism makes the experience of living with autism different for each family. But there are some consistent themes or issues that most families will want to be aware of to be able to provide the best support to the individual and to family members.

CARING FOR AUTISM

Currently, the lifetime cost of caring for a child with autism ranges from \$3.5 million to \$5 million, and the United States is facing almost \$90 billion annually in costs for autism. This figure includes research, insurance costs and non-covered expenses, Medicaid waivers, educational spending, housing, transportation, employment, and therapeutic services and caregiver costs.

AUTISM PREVALENCE

In December 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued their ADDM autism prevalence report. The report concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 110 births in the United States and almost 1 in 70 boys. The issuance of this report caused a media uproar, but the news was not a surprise to the Autism Society or to the 1.5 million Americans living with the effects of autism spectrum disorder. Nonetheless, the spotlight on the prevalence of autism opens opportunities for the nation to consider how to serve these families facing a lifetime of support for their children.

GETTING INVOLVED

There are many ways to get involved in the autism community. *Here are a few:*

- Educate yourself and your family about autism
- Stay informed about the latest news in autism
- Attend an autism event or conference
- Understand the latest autism advocacy efforts
- Join a local Autism Society chapter

RESOURCES

Visit the Autism Society website at www.autism-society.org for great resources and information about autism. This information should help to equip families with some of the basic tools they may need to provide the best outcomes for their loved ones.

You can also always stop by the Health & Wellness office for more ideas and resources.