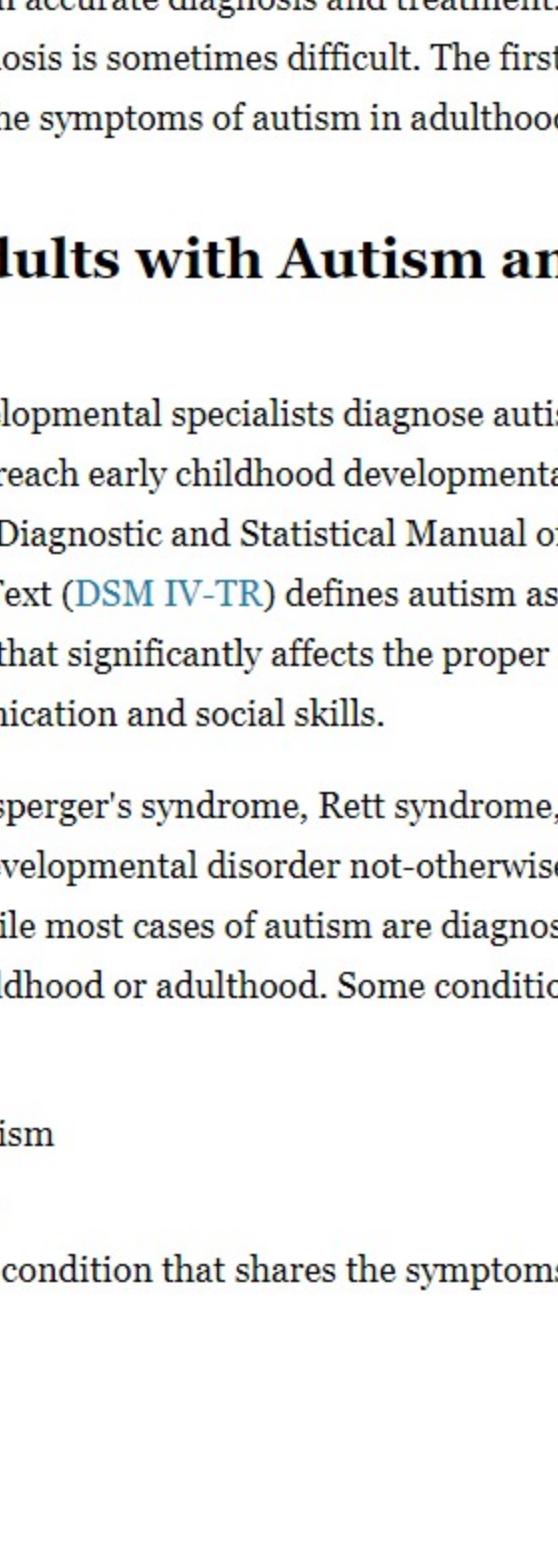
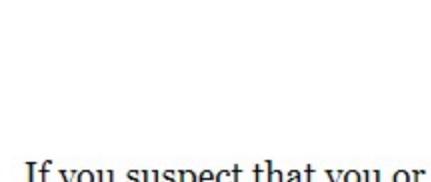


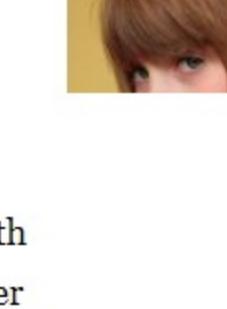
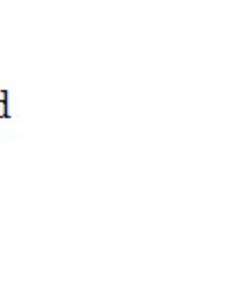
Autism » Diagnosing Autism » Diagnosing Adults with Autism

Diagnosing Adults with Autism

By Adrienne Warber



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If you suspect that you or a loved one has autism, information about diagnosing adults with autism can help you get an accurate diagnosis and treatment. Since autism resembles other medical conditions, diagnosis is sometimes difficult. The first step toward getting a correct diagnosis is recognizing the symptoms of autism in adulthood.

Diagnosing Adults with Autism and Missed Symptoms

Usually, doctors and developmental specialists diagnose autism during childhood, usually when the patient doesn't reach early childhood developmental milestones. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fourth Edition, Revised Text ([DSM IV-TR](#)) defines autism as one of five pervasive developmental disorders that significantly affects the proper development of language and speech as well as communication and social skills.

The five PDDs, autism, Asperger's syndrome, Rett syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise-specified, share a similar pattern of symptoms. While most cases of autism are diagnosed in early childhood, some are diagnosed in later childhood or adulthood. Some conditions can lead to a diagnosis later in life:

- High functioning autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- Misdiagnosed with a condition that shares the symptoms of autism

High Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

In some cases of mild autism, an individual is able to function relatively well in everyday life. This can make a diagnosis difficult because parents and doctors may not recognize subtle signs of autism. Asperger's, in particular, can be difficult to detect early because an affected person may reach early childhood developmental milestones. People with Asperger's often have impressive vocabularies, but they have deficits in social communication. It is easy to mistake communication and social skill problems for shyness and "late blooming." Sometimes other problems, such as attention deficit hyperactivity or speech issues can make identifying Aspergers difficult.

Recognizing Autism Symptoms in Adults

Autistic adults often exhibit eccentric behaviors, and it can be easy to write off the odd behavior as quirkiness. While a number of people without autism or any other neurological condition may indeed have socially eccentric habits and behaviors, some behaviors stand out as symptoms of autism.

- Requires a strict routine and will become irrationally upset if the routine or schedule changes
- Socially awkward and prefers solitude
- Has trouble participating in a two-way conversation and may appear to talk at people rather than with them
- Irritability and fits of rage that resemble a child's temper tantrum
- Focuses on a narrow range of interests and activities
- Observes repetitive behaviors, such as rocking back and forth, hand flapping, clenching muscles or flicking fingers
- May have obsessive rituals like washing hands exactly six times, or aligning a book collection in a specific order
- Has trouble understanding verbal instructions
- Difficulty fitting into a work environment and not much of a team player
- Sustaining relationships with others is challenging due to communication issues
- Takes many things literally and does not get sarcasm, irony or subtle language
- Misinterprets or misses body language and social cues
- Inability to comprehend other's emotions can lead to inappropriate social responses
- Can sometimes appear to lack empathy or act in a cold manner to others
- May have sensory processing issues and experience unusual reactions to certain noises, sights, smells or textures
- Has problems focusing attention and may also have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or attention deficit disorder (ADD)

Similarity to Other Conditions

A person with autism can sometimes be misdiagnosed with another condition that has similar symptoms. In fact, it is also common for a person with autism to have multiple coexisting (comorbid) medical conditions. In some of these cases of comorbidity, doctors can miss the autism symptoms.

Conditions often confused with autism diagnosis are:

- Social anxiety disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Sensory processing disorder
- Nonverbal learning disorder
- Intellectual disability
- Bipolar disorder
- Schizophrenia

Seeking a Correct Diagnosis and Getting Help

If you recognize any symptoms of autism in yourself or a loved one, contact your doctor to seek a diagnosis. If you do not have a regular doctor, contact a local autism support organization for a list of recommended doctors. Many national autism support organizations like the [Autism Society of America](#) or the [Autism Research Institute](#) also have lists of autism specialists throughout the country. Visiting the websites of these organizations and similar groups can also help you find helpful information to get an autism diagnosis.

Here's the rub; many people can experience the symptoms of autism on a subclinical level. The major concern is the severity of the symptoms. Are they interfering with your ability to function on a daily basis? If not, you may not meet the requirements for a clinical diagnosis.

Hope for Adults with Autism

Do not lose hope if you or a loved one receives a diagnosis of autism later in life. Today there are many effective treatments for autism that can improve life quality. Ongoing research continues to look for more answers on possible causes and the best treatments for autism. People can live a fulfilling and productive life with autism and the right treatment plan.

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