

What to Watch For

Autism is on the rise, but early diagnosis can lead to early intervention, and give kids a chance at better lives. Here are some early signs, plus a look at treatments and trends.

-JOSH ULICK

A TYPICAL BABY

Children develop at their own pace, so it's hard to know when an individual will learn a given skill. Here are some general guidelines to help mark your baby's progress.

at 7 months



Many children are able to:

- turn head when name is called
- smile back at another person
- respond to sound with sounds
- enjoy social play (such as peekaboo)

Autism Spectrum

- **Autism:** Severe language problems, lack of interest in others, repetitive behaviors, resistance to change, irrational routines.
- **Asperger's:** Relatively strong verbal skills, but trouble reading social situations and sharing enjoyment, obsessive interests.
- **PDD-NOS:** Known as 'atypical autism,' kids have less severe social impairments.
- **Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD):** Normal growth for 2 to 4 years, then autismlike symptoms develop.
- **Rett Syndrome:** Similar pattern as CDD but occurs earlier and mostly in girls.

at 1 year



Many children are able to:

- use simple gestures (wave 'bye-bye')
- make sounds such as 'ma' and 'da'
- imitate actions in play (clap when you clap)
- respond when told 'no'

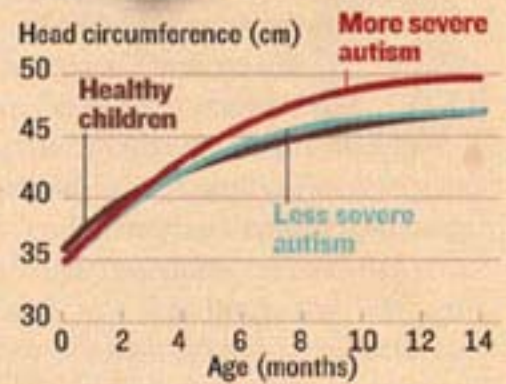
In the Brain

Studies show that children with autism undergo abnormal brain development from early infancy. Researchers found that affected kids start out with slightly smaller heads than average, then undergo explosive brain growth, with severe cases growing the fastest.

Brain of a 3-year-old child with autism



Brain of a typical 3-year-old



at 18 months



Many children are able to:

- do simple pretend play (e.g., 'talk' on a toy ph
- point to interesting objects
- look at objects that you point out
- use several individual words unprompted

How Common Is It?

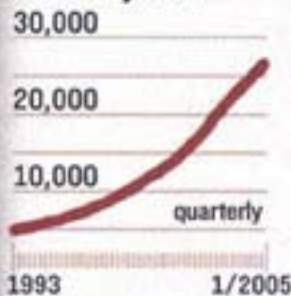
The number of children diagnosed with autism has jumped 10 times in the last 20 years, and more children are now treated at a younger age. These increases may be due in part to more aggressive screening.

Nationwide:

1 child in **166** has autism

Boys outnumber girls **4 to 1**

Cases in Calif. health system



Patients treated in Calif., by age

