

# What is AUTISM?

**Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC)** are lifelong developmental disorders characterised by a triad of impairments in **Social Interaction**, **Communication** and **Imagination**. Asperger's Syndrome is a type of ASC.

Alongside the triad of impairments, people with ASC will often demonstrate repetitive behaviour patterns, resistance to change and unusual sensitivity to particular sounds, sights, tastes, textures and even pain. People with ASC may also have a learning disability and some have epilepsy.

People with ASC experience physical and emotional problems just like everybody else. However, considering the majority of people with autism have some level of learning disability and some may never speak, they have extreme difficulty conveying what is wrong to others.

This can occasionally lead to inappropriate behaviour, which some may find challenging, especially when the person is anxious, such as in formal, unfamiliar environments like hospitals, dentists etc.

The aim of this leaflet is thus to offer some quick suggestions and practical advice to all health professionals, in order to aid them working with people with autism, so that the experience is as smooth running as possible for all individuals involved.

## For more information contact:

- **Autism Anglia**  
01206 577678  
[www.autism-anglia.org.uk](http://www.autism-anglia.org.uk)  
[info@autism-anglia.org.uk](mailto:info@autism-anglia.org.uk)
- **The National Autistic Society**  
0845 080 4004  
[www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

## Further reading:

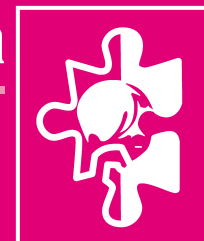
- Adults with Autism (1996)  
by Hugh Morgan
- The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome (2007) by Tony Attwood
- Autism: The Facts (2002)  
by Simon Baron-Cohen and Patrick Bolton
- Children with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Practitioners and Carers (1998) by Patricia Howlin
- Autism and its Medical Management: A Guide for Parents & Professionals (2008)  
By Michael Chez

Written by the Clinical Psychology Department.  
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# Autism Anglia

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## Autistic Spectrum Conditions



## Guidelines for Health Professionals

## What to do...

- **DO** allow the carer to stay with the patient and ask them for advice if needed.
- **DO** speak slowly and clearly, using the patients name to get their attention first.
- **DO** keep your language simple and direct with short sentences where possible e.g. Sam please stand up.
- **DO** use visual cues where possible to aid understanding e.g. photos, symbols, dolls, objects etc.
- **DO** give the patient extra time to process what you have said.
- **DO** explain to the patient why they are there and what you are going to do them and why.
- **DO** give warning before you touch them and ask for their permission.
- **DO** try to divert their attention elsewhere when taking blood etc.
- **DO** listen to the carers if they ask you to do or not to do something.

### DO STAY CALM

## What not to do...

- **DON'T** make the person wait in a crowded, noisy waiting room. This will only increase anxiety. Try to find a quiet side room.
- **DON'T** ignore the patient. They might be trying to communicate what is wrong in their own verbal or non verbal way.
- **DON'T** use body language, gestures or facial expressions without verbal / visual instructions.
- **DON'T** use flowery phrases and abstract ideas.
- **DON'T** expect the person to make eye contact with you. Lack of eye contact does not mean that they are not listening.
- **DON'T** discuss things in front of the person as it may increase their anxiety.
- **DON'T** attempt to stop flapping, tapping, rocking etc behaviours unless it is essential.

## What to be aware of...

People with ASC can be extremely sensitive to specific sensory stimuli (vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch) and this varies depending on the individual. It is important to think about the senses when treating your patient.

- **SENSITIVE VISION:** Turn off fluorescent lights where possible or flashing stimuli and be wary when using pen lights.
- **SENSITIVE HEARING:** Limit the amount of noise in the room as much as possible. Close windows; turn off unnecessary machines, radio etc.
- **PAIN:** People with AS can have a very high pain threshold and may demonstrate an unusual response to pain, including laughter, humming, singing, taking clothes off etc.
- **MEDICATION:** Some people with ASC have an unusual reaction to medication, for example becoming 'hyper' with sedatives. Check with the carer first.

A person with ASC can easily be overloaded with sensory information in busy places, such as A&E, where there are lots of people, machines etc. The way in which this sensory overload is dealt with depends on the individual. Some may rock, tap objects, flap hands etc, whereas others might withdraw, placing their fingers in their ears etc.

These behaviours help calm the individual so it is very important not to stop these behaviours unless necessary.

