

## Doctors and Diagnosing Autism

When a doctor first suggests that your child has autism, your immediate reaction might be disbelief and the urge to seek a second, third, or even fourth opinion. Because autism is so different in every child, it is a tricky disorder to diagnose. However, there are a few key ways in which doctors can efficiently identify autism in children, and if your infant or toddler is showing any of these signs of autism, you should visit your pediatrician immediately to express your concerns.

Autism occurs at a young age, rather than being a disorder an older child might develop. It is usually detected before the age of three, and many times much earlier. The first signs of autism are usually delays or regression in speech communication. Another early sign is abnormal behavior in group play situations and other social situations. The first step to diagnosing autism is a thorough physical examination as well as a review of family history by a specialist. Although your regular pediatrician will be able to spot unusual behavior, you'll want your child to be examined by a professional who specializes in autism and other similar diseases to make sure your child is properly diagnosed.

The next step includes hearing tests. Since language and social skill delays could be due to inadequate auditory sensations. There are two types of auditory tests, one of which records the tones a child can hear and the other of which requires sedation and measures the brain response to certain tones. Of course, the first method is preferred, since it does not require any use of a sedative. After auditory testing, your doctor may encourage testing your child for Fragile X syndrome, which often times goes hand in hand with autism. Metabolism can also be evaluated. To do this, your doctor will need a blood or urine sample to analyze DNA.

An MRI or CAT scan can also be helpful in diagnosing autism. The important thing is to work with doctors you trust. Second opinions can be very helpful, but when your child has been diagnosed, stick with one doctor so that treatment is uniform and so that your child will get used to this person. Autism is difficult to diagnose and even more difficult to treat, so remember that you should begin to learn as much as possible about the disorder as soon as your doctor identifies it. If you have yet to speak with your doctor about abnormal behavior in your child, do so immediately. By detecting autism early, you give your child a better chance at becoming a high-functioning individual with much more opportunities in life.