Autism greatly affects the patient as well as his or her family. The etiology is not completely understood. Patients exhibit varying degrees of severity. Possible genetic links are being explored.

### The condition

**Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):** Various disorders that impact developmental well-being such as communication, social interaction, and behavioral impairments.

### Pathophysiology

- Unknown cause
- Generally thought as an abnormality in brain structure or function
- Autistic brains are slightly larger and heavier.
- Theories include: heredity, genetics & medical problems
- No single trigger.

### Clinical Manifestations

- Insistence on sameness; resistance to change
- Repeating words or phrases in place of normal, responsive language
- Preference to being alone
- Tantrums
- Little or no eye contact
- Noticeable physical over-activity or extreme under-activity
- Uneven gross/fine motor skills
- Non-responsive to verbal cues; appears deaf

### The condition in populations

- **Prevalence**
  - Average of 1 in 150 in US have ASD
  - Occur in ALL Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Groups
  - 4 to 7 times More in Boys than Girls
  - 560,000 between 0 to 21 years old have an ASD
  - Median Age of Earliest ASD Diagnosis Range from 4.5 years to 5.5 years.

- **Risk Factors**
  - Identical Twins vs. Nonidentical Twins
  - Parents who have one child with an ASD have a 2 to 8% chance of having another child that will be affected with an ASD.

- **Diagnosis**
  - 1/3 of Parents Notice Problems before their Childs 1st Birthday
  - 80% of Parents saw Problems by 24 months

### Community Nursing Interventions

- **Education**
- **Early signs**
- **Possible developmental delays**
- **Community Warning Signs of ASD**
- **Healthy Lifestyle & Environment to Encourage Development of Child to Full Potential**
- **Developmental Screening**
- **Research**
  - Nationwide interventions (CDC)
- **Support**
  - Contact Information for ASD

### Treatments

- **Behavior and Communication**
  The focus of speech & language therapy is to expand range of the child's communication skills.

- **Dietary Approaches**
  Based on the idea that food allergies or lack of vitamins/minerals cause symptoms of ASDs.

- **Medication (ex: Risperidone)**
  - Manage high energy levels, inability to focus, depression, or seizures