

PART 2: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER PREVALENCE AND COMORBID ISSUES

This is Part 2 of a 5-part series about the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders and the issues commonly associated with it. It is important to be aware of these issues for best practice in treating and supporting people with the diagnosis and their families. All parts within the series are as follows:

- Part 1: ASD-Early Identification
- Part 2: ASD-Prevalence and Comorbid Issues
- Part 3: ASD-Support
- Part 4: ASD-Treatment
- Part 5: ASD-Communicating with People Diagnosed with ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Prevalence

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, prevalence for ASD is identified in 1 in 59 children and 4 times more common in boys than girls. It is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is without a medical test or cure. Overall, it is more common than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes, and pediatric AIDS COMBINED.

Comorbidity Issues

Below are common issues associated with ASD which are important to be aware about when evaluating, treating, supporting, and making referrals for this population.

- Additional mental disorder (70%); 40% with 2+ disorders
- Aggressive behavior (68% toward caregiver and 49% toward non caregivers; 33% self-injurious behaviors)
- Anxiety (11-84%)
- ADHD (29-83%)
- Drowning leading cause of death (90-91% those under 14 years)
- Elopement: wandering/bolting (92% reported by parents)
- Epilepsy/seizures (as high as 77.5%)
- Food sensitivity (twice as likely)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (~30% with range 1.8-81%)
- Other mental disorders (as high as 90%)
- Phobias (10-64%)
- Premature or Low Birth Weight (small

percentage at greater risk)

- Auditory Disorders and Infections (87.8%)
- Autoimmune Disorders (high incidence)
- Behavioral issues (increase with age) and may indicate an underlying medical condition
- Bipolar disorder (6-21% in adults diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome; 10% of Asperger Syndrome relatives)
- Bowel disease (up to 50% with persistent gastrointestinal tract problems)
- Fragile X (2-5%)
- Gender dysphoria (more likely)
- Genetic, familial, chromosomal conditions (identical twins diagnosed 36-95%; non-identical twins 0-31%; one child with ASD then risk of another increased by 2-18%; risk increased with parent age; 10-15% with single-gene condition, chromosomal abnormality, or other genetic or chromosomal disorder)
- Healthcare issues (0-50% of teens with ASD receive transition services)
- Intellectual disability or cognitive delay (20-70%)
- Psychosis and psychiatric disorders (as high as 33%)
- Schizophrenia (4-35% in adults)
- Tourette Syndrome (~6.5%)
- Sensory problems (42-88%)
- Tuberous sclerosis (1-4%)

- Bullied (67%)
- Depression (2-30%)
- Developmental differences (evident from 6 months of age with social, communication, and fine motor skills)
- Developmental Coordination Disorder
- Developmental regression with language and social interests between 1-3 years of age affects one in five with ASD
- Language disorder (33% nonverbal)
- Learning disorder/disability (25-75%)
- Mitochondrial diseases (5-80%)
- Mood disorder (25%)
- Mortality (3-10 times higher than the general population)
- Sleep disorders (53-78%)
- Vision and Hearing concerns (reported by parents in the first year of life)
- Weight issues (32% of 2-5 year olds were overweight and 16% were obese)

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