

# Questions to Ask Your Pediatrician About Autism

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# Overview

- \* Questions to ask your pediatrician when you suspect the diagnosis
- \* Questions to ask your pediatrician once the diagnosis is made

# When You Suspect the Diagnosis

- \* **What are the signs of autism?**
- \* Communication impairments
- \* Social skills deficits
- \* Limited range of interests and activities

# Communication in Young Children with Autism

- \* Frequently ignore language
- \* Deficits in nonverbal communication (eye gaze, pointing and gesturing, facial expression, etc.)
- \* Echolalia
- \* Impairments in receptive and expressive language
- \* Language regression in 1/3 of cases

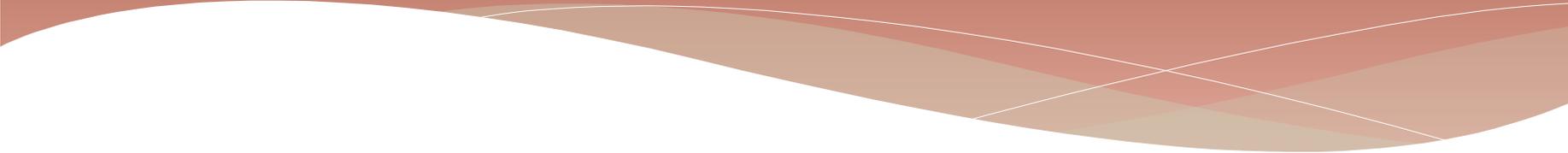
# Social Interaction in Young Children with Autism

- \* “Off in his own world”
- \* Lack of joint attention, shared enjoyment
- \* Difficult to engage in interactive play
- \* Social deficits often most evident with same age peers

# Range of Activities in Young Children with Autism

- \* Minimal or atypical toy play
- \* Strong preoccupations
- \* Perseverative activities or speech
- \* Insistence on routine, rituals
- \* Abnormal response to sensory input

# First Signs



# When You Suspect the Diagnosis of Autism

- \* **Can we screen for autism?**
- \* The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended specific autism screening at 18 and 24 month well child checks.
- \* Many screening tools are available
- \* Perhaps the most widely used is M-CHAT
- \* Readily available and sensitive

# When You Suspect the Diagnosis

- \* **What services are available?**
- \* First Steps provides services for any child with developmental disabilities below the age of 3
- \* Includes speech therapy, occupational therapy, developmental intervention, behavior interventions
- \* The public school system provides preschool and therapy services after age 3
- \* Don't wait to start services

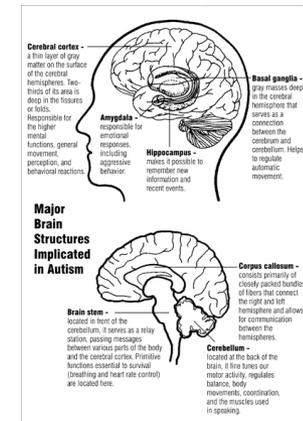
# When You Suspect the Diagnosis

- \* **How can I get definitive diagnosis?**
- \* Facilities throughout the state can provide evaluations; most are in academic centers
- \* Evaluation should include thorough history, behavioral observations, developmental measures, autism diagnostic tool
- \* Medical evaluation also helpful

# Once the Diagnosis is Made



- \* **What causes autism?**
- \* Etiology still unknown
- \* Neurobiologic disorder due to differences in brain development
- \* Strong genetic component
- \* Possible environmental factors



# Once the Diagnosis is Made

- \* **How common is autism?**
- \* Current research indicates prevalence rate of 1 in 88
- \* Dramatic increase in prevalence over last 20 to 30 years
- \* In part, due to increased awareness, better diagnostic tools, increased services, etc.

# Once the Diagnosis is Made

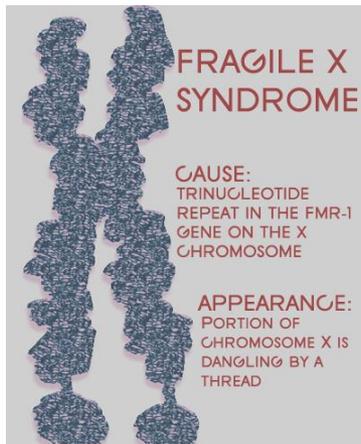
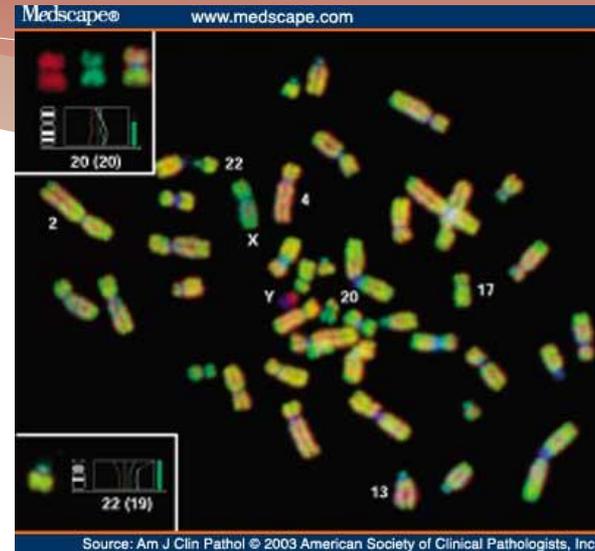
- \* **What are the risks for having a second child with autism?**
- \* Previously quoted as 3 to 8%
- \* Recent study of siblings of children with autism indicated recurrence risk of nearly 19%

# Once the Diagnosis is Made



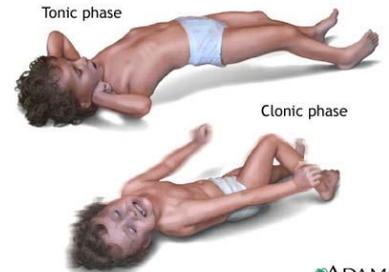
- \* **Should any medical tests be done?**
- \* Autism is associated with other medical and genetic conditions in 10 to 15% of cases
- \* Genetic testing recommended to include Fragile X DNA testing, microarray chromosome analysis
- \* Sleep deprived EEG if history of language regression
- \* Consider MRI of brain

# Medical Tests



# Once the Diagnosis is Made

- \* **Are there any medical conditions more common in autism?**
- \* Intellectual disability is identified in approximately 50% of children with autism
- \* Seizures are present in approximately one-third of children with autism



# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What about vaccinations and autism?**

- \* First concerns were raised about measles vaccine and autism
- \* Initial work discredited; numerous studies showed no relationship between autism and measles vaccine
- \* Later concern about thimerosal and autism
- \* Studies showed no relationship; no longer used as preservative in vaccines



# Once the Diagnosis is Made

- \* **What about sleep?**
- \* Many children with ASD have sleep problems
- \* Disruption in Circadian rhythms
- \* Difficulty falling and staying asleep, waking early
- \* Behavioral interventions first line
- \* Melatonin may be helpful



# Once diagnosis is made

- \* **What about eating habits?**
- \* Often very limited food repertoires
- \* Can be based on sensory issues
- \* Behavioral approach often very effective
- \* Systematic approach to introducing new foods
- \* Provide rewards and exposure, not trying to force



# Once the Diagnosis is Made

- \* **What is the treatment for autism?**
- \* Primarily educational and behavioral
- \* 24 evidence based practices
- \* Speech therapy
- \* Occupational therapy
- \* Social skills training



# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What about behavioral problems associated with autism?**
- \* Behavioral problems common
- \* Attention problems and hyperactivity
- \* Anxiety and depression
- \* Marked irritability with mood lability, aggression, self injurious behavior



# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What role does medication have in the treatment of autism?**
- \* Medication does not address core symptoms of autism
- \* Adjunctive to help with associated behavior problems that interfere with home, school and community function

# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What medications are used to treat these behavioral problems?**
- \* Medications for ADHD: stimulants, nonstimulants
- \* Medications for depression/anxiety: SSRI's
- \* Medications for severe irritability: atypical antipsychotics

# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What should I ask before starting medication?**
- \* What behaviors are being targeted by the medication?
- \* What side effects are possible?
- \* What monitoring should be done?
- \* How will we measure progress on medication?

# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What about alternative biomedical interventions?**
- \* Wide variety available, including dietary changes, vitamins, and supplements
- \* Others: hyperbaric oxygen, chelation therapy
- \* Little research available



# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What should I consider if I want to try biomedical interventions?**
- \* Potential benefits
- \* Potential side effects
- \* Expense
- \* Role in overall program
- \* Evidence supporting intervention

# Once the diagnosis is made

- \* **What can I expect in the future?**
- \* Progress, but variable in rate
- \* Factors in prognosis: intelligence, temperament, language, early intervention
- \* Access services and supports to optimize child's potential, but realize that each child's potential is different

# Once the Diagnosis is Made

- \* **Where do I go from here?**
- \* Educate yourself about autism
- \* Access appropriate educational and behavioral services
- \* Become an advocate for your child
- \* Resources: KATC Family Guide, AAP, Autism Speaks, CDC, local family support groups