

Autism (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

PATIENT GUIDE

THE
ADHD &
AUTISM
CLINIC

Deciding whether to undergo an assessment

Anyone can choose to have an autism assessment, but it is important to consider whether an assessment is needed. A good starting point is to consider whether an assessment/diagnosis would be helpful to you. For people who are in education and employment, a diagnosis may be required to access reasonable adjustments to study/working arrangements. Or for example, you may be looking for specific help around communication and your relationships with others. Some people may only be curious to understand why they have challenges that other people do not have. It may also be helpful to discuss your thoughts with a family member, a colleague, or your GP.



The assessment process

There are several steps when undergoing an autism assessment. The process starts with the completion of registration documents. Once we have received your completed registration documents, we will send you a pre-assessment questionnaire known as the AQ-50.

As soon as you have completed your registration form, you will be able to schedule an appointment with one of our psychiatrists, but please note that if we do not receive the completed AQ-50, your appointment will need to be released, and you will need to schedule another appointment.

To ensure that assessments are comprehensive and reliable, we use a multidisciplinary approach when assessing for autism. There are several parts to an autism assessment which include:

1. An initial consultation with a consultant psychiatrist. This appointment may take up to two hours to complete.
2. A structured observation assessment. We use the ADOS-2 assessment tool (see below). ADOS-2 is short for Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-Second Edition.
3. An interview with an informant (who preferably has knowledge of your early development), or in some cases, the completion of a detailed questionnaire by a nominated informant.

Autism diagnostic observation schedule – second edition (ADOS-2)

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule - Second Edition (ADOS-2) is a standardised diagnostic test which is regarded as the “*gold standard*” tool used for the assessment and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The test consists of several structured and semi-structured tasks involving social interaction between the examiner and the person being assessed. The ADOS-2 examiner will observe and identify the person’s behaviour and assign these to predetermined observational categories. Once categorised, the examiner observations are subsequently combined to produce quantitative scores. Research-determined cut-off points identify the potential diagnosis of ASD, thereby allowing a standardised assessment of autistic symptoms.

Although the ADOS-2 is considered the “*gold standard*” for ASD assessment, it is important to note that it is just one source of information and is not on its own sufficient for making a diagnosis of ASD. The ADOS-2 should always be part of a comprehensive evaluation that also considers a person’s developmental history, the information provided by parents and/or other key informants, behavioural observations both during and outside the ADOS-2 assessment, and the judgement of experienced clinicians.

Letters and reports

After your assessment, your psychiatrist will write a comprehensive assessment letter to your GP. The letter will be sent to you first for checking. This gives you an opportunity to review what information will be shared with your GP. It also gives you the opportunity to correct any information which has been presented incorrectly. You will have five working days to check the letter. If you cannot make the changes in that period, providing that you let our office know, we can extend the deadline. However, if we do not hear from you, we will assume that you are ready for the letter to be sent to your GP. You will also receive a copy of the final version of your GP letter.

As well as a full GP letter, we will provide you with a brief letter addressed to whom it may concern which will state your diagnosis. These letters may be useful for sharing with education providers, employers etc. The usual format of the letter is to give the diagnosis and to explain that further information may be requested from our service with your written consent. However, most people find that these letters, which read like a diagnosis certificate, are adequate for most purposes. The benefit of having a brief letter is that you do not have to share personal information about your life when providing evidence of your diagnosis.

Other interventions

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder. Unlike other neurodevelopmental disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, medication is not routinely prescribed for autistic people. However, autism may lead to other mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, autistic people may benefit from treatment with psychotropic medication, but only if the medication is required to treat associated symptoms.

Many autistic people feel a huge sense of relief and acceptance, when they receive a diagnosis of autism. Not all people who experience autistic traits choose to undergo formal assessment as they may already self-identify as being autistic. It is generally





accepted that the world is favourable towards neurotypical people, which often disadvantages autistic people. To be able to request reasonable adjustments to live, study and work without so many barriers, a diagnosis is often required as evidence.

Autistic people may find communication particularly difficult. Many autistic people struggle with communication that is not direct and literal. Coping with inferred meaning and devices such as innuendo and sarcasm may be particularly difficult to process. Although people may adapt and find ways around these differences in communication, there are specific interventions to help people better understand others and to feel more confident in their communication.



to view our current fees

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