

Post Diagnostic Management and Follow up Care for Autism

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INTRODUCTION

When you have just identified that your child has Autism Spectrum Disorder, the news comes in a shock especially when you are not really expecting it. As a parent, you might have many queries about their future that may include their communication development, education, social life etc. The first thing you must understand is that you are not alone in this journey. Always believe that; though there is no cure for autism, there is a hope. The family of the child must get educated themselves from the professionals during the initial days of diagnosis itself.

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

It is a developmental disorder, diagnosed within the age of 3 years with difficulty in social interaction, communication and stereotypic behaviors. Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder can be verbal nonverbal, high functioning or lower functioning.

IDENTIFICATION AND DIAGNOSIS FOR ASD

Pediatricians have a key role in identifying and evaluating autism at a very early childhood age itself. They also have a role in referring them to the right professionals for further evaluations and interventions.

POST DIAGNOSTIC MANAGEMENT FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Post diagnosis, the treatment goal is to target the symptoms of ASD, along with any co morbidities. If they have any co morbidities, it should be monitored routinely. The specified goals also include communication (verbal and non verbal), play, social interaction and behavior management.

The therapeutic management team for ASD includes therapists, medical professionals, behavior analysts and educators. The most

important team members are the family members of the child. The child's family needs to be counseled about every intervention program and must be provided with reports or documentation of the effectiveness of each program.

KEY POINTS OF POST DIAGNOSTIC MANAGEMENT

- Audiological evaluation. Vision testing. Genetic testing if anything is indicated. Physical and neurological examination.
- Dental Sleep Nutrition (diet) Rule out psychiatric disorders Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Other child specific conditions, if any
- Speech and Language therapy Occupational therapy Physiotherapy Individualized education program
- Enroll the child into behavioral intervention programs
- Parental education about ASD Provide home program plans to carry out therapy at home

CORE TEAM IN POST DIAGNOSTIC THERAPEUTIC MANAGEMENT

Speech and language therapy: For a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, intensive speech and language stimulation should be provided to improve their communication (verbal, non-verbal and social) skills. If the child seems to be non-verbal, a speech language pathologist can deliver Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) aids too. It includes picture based communication system (Picture Exchange Communication - PECS), communication boards, visual communication aids, gestures, signs, high tech communication aids or devices (Avaz, Proloque). These AAC's will enhance the communication skills of non-verbal children.

Occupational therapy: Occupational therapy addresses the problems faced by children in their daily life. They also work on improving the child's gross motor, fine motor and sensory processing challenges. An occupational therapist can help a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder to be independent in their self-care as they target the child's daily activity skills.

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Physiotherapy: Physiotherapy can improve the child's gross motor skills and help them manage balance, coordination and gait.

Psychologist: A psychologist can do a detailed psychological evaluation on the child's cognitive and learning skills.