

World Autism Awareness Day



World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) is celebrated on 2 April every year. It's a permanent fixture on the global health calendar to raise awareness about autism and encourage early diagnosis and treatment.

What is autism?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that causes problems with social interaction and communication. Symptoms usually start before age three and can cause delays or problems in many different skills that develop from infancy to adulthood.

What is an autism spectrum disorder?

Different people with autism can have very different symptoms. Health-care providers think of autism as a spectrum disorder (ASD), a group of disorders with similar features. One person may have mild symptoms, while another may have serious symptoms. But they both have an autism spectrum disorder.

The autism spectrum disorder category includes:

- Autistic disorder (also called classic autism).
- Asperger syndrome.
- Pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) (or atypical autism).

What are the symptoms of autism?

The main signs and symptoms of autism involve problems in the following areas, usually observed by 18 months of age:

- **Communication:** Both verbal (spoken) and non-verbal (unspoken).
- **Social:** Such as sharing emotions, and understanding how others think and feel.

- **Routines or repetitive behaviours (also called stereotyped behaviours):** Such as repeating words or actions and obsessively following routines or schedules.

What are the treatments for autism?

There is no cure for autism, nor is there one single treatment for autism spectrum disorders.

There are ways, however, to help minimise the symptoms of autism and to maximise learning:

- **Behavioural therapy and other therapeutic options:** Such as speech-language therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists.
- **Educational and/or school-based options:** Such as schools that cater specifically for children with ASD if their problems are severe.
- **Medication options:** Currently there are no medications that can cure autism spectrum disorders, but in many cases medication can treat some of the symptoms.

How you and your company can get involved

In 2010, the leading autism organisation Autism Speaks launched an ongoing campaign called Light It Up Blue to further increase awareness around WAAD. Every year, individuals, corporates, and organisations alike are encouraged to light up their homes and offices using blue light bulbs and temporary blue window tints, to wear blue and to tweet autism facts and information using the #LIUB.