

Treatment Options for Autism

This review covers various treatment options for autism, but is not an exhaustive list of options, nor is PACE endorsing any type of treatment. The information presented in below is to be used for informational purposes only, and options should be discussed with your child's doctor prior to starting treatment as each child has unique needs.

Autism is classified as a pervasive developmental disorder, which means that it is a lifelong disorder. There is currently no known cure for autism. However, there are several types of interventions and therapies that have greatly benefited children with autism.

We have categorized various treatments into 5 categories.

1) Behavioral Therapies

- a. **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** – an evidence-based scientific process which uses the principles of learning and motivation to change behavior. Use of positive reinforcement is key. In the US, many insurance plans cover ABA treatment for autism.
- b. **Verbal Behavior Therapy** – based on the principles of ABA and helps children understand that communicating can get them positive results. Can help children with speech delays as well as adults with limited language skills learn to communicate their needs.
- c. **Pivotal Response Treatment®** – has its roots in ABA and is a highly validated play-based treatment for children with autism. Focus is on “pivotal” areas of child development, such as self-management, social interactions, motivation and responses to various cues.
- d. **The Early Start Denver Model** – an early intervention treatment for children between the ages of 12 - 48 months. Proposes a development curriculum to be used at each developmental stage. Parental involvement is a cornerstone in this model.

2) Relationship Based Therapies

- a. **Floortime/DIR** – developed by a child psychiatrist and involves parents and caregivers interacting with children at their level by literally getting on the floor and following their lead. This technique helps children with emotional thinking, two way communication and strengthening relationships
- b. **Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI)** – designed to treat the core symptoms of autism and is a family-based treatment that can be used at home. Focus is on helping individuals develop stronger social and emotional bonds and develop an ability to think flexibly.
- c. **Son-rise** – employs a set of techniques based on the belief that autism is a social relational disorder rather than a behavioral disorder. Designed to improve learning development, communication and the ability to acquire new skills; it is a home-based treatment requiring a high level of involvement from an individual's caregivers.

3) Communication Treatments

- a. **Speech and Language therapy** – helps children with speech and language disorders and is a critical part of early intervention for autism. Therapists work with individuals to help them with understanding language, speaking words, conducting a

conversation and using non-verbal gestures. A commonly used form of augmentative and alternative communication is PECS® - Picture Exchange Communication System.

- b. **Social Skills Groups** – help individuals with autism to learn how to more effectively interact with their peers. These groups are especially helpful for individuals with high functioning autism to learn how to express themselves comfortably with their peers.
- ### 4) Physical and Motor Movement and Development
- a. **Occupational Therapy** – helps children to become more effective in their everyday activities, such as eating, sleeping, education, work, play etc. Occupational therapists help identify the level at which an individual with autism can function, and provide therapy to help improve their skills and performance.
 - b. **Sensory Integration Therapy** – helps develop the nervous system's ability to process sensory input in a more effective way. Therapists may use play activities to change the way the brain reacts to sight, sound, touch, smell and movement.
 - c. **Physical Therapy** – focuses on helping individuals develop better coordination, muscle tone, balance and improving gross and fine motor skills.

5) Biomedical Treatments

- a. **DIET (GFCF)** – The gluten-free casein free diet eliminates all foods which contain gluten or casein, based on the theory that children with autism may be sensitive to these common allergens.
- b. **Vitamin Therapy** – Research suggests that children with autism may be deficient in certain vitamins, and supplemental vitamins may help with certain symptoms.
- c. **Behavior Medications** – There are limited medications that have been approved by the FDA for use in children with autism. They aim to ease symptoms such as irritability and repetitive behavior.
- d. **Homeopathy** – a system of medicine that is used to treat many different ailments. Homeopathy uses highly diluted substances from natural sources to trigger the body's natural immune system.

Additional Resources:

- [ASAT Treatments Overview](#)
- [Autism Speaks Tool Kit](#)
- [Autism Treatment Center](#)
- [National Autism Network](#)
- [Stanley Greenspan Floortime](#)