

Adult diagnosis



Being diagnosed with autism as an adult

Why you might choose to seek a diagnosis

Until the last few decades, it was thought that autism only affected children – but now we know that it's a lifelong condition. This means that there are many adults who were not assessed when they were younger, but are Autistic.

In this fact sheet, we explore some considerations in receiving an autism diagnosis later in life. If you've been thinking about seeking a diagnosis, this one's for you!



First of all, how does an autism diagnosis work?

There's no medical test (such as a blood test) that can be used to diagnose autism (the same goes for children). Instead, medical or allied health professionals will generally want to meet in person and ask you questions about your life and your experiences.

Assessments aren't always easy to access due to lengthy waitlists, so some adults may choose to self-identify as Autistic. Self-identification is helpful for connection with their identity and the Autistic community, and may lead to seeking formal support when possible.

How can a diagnosis help?

According to those who have been diagnosed as adults, receiving their autism diagnosis was positive in a number of ways.

- 1. Greater self-awareness.** For many adults, an autism diagnosis can explain past challenges and differences, providing a sense of relief and validation. In the words of one such adult: "I understand there's a reason why I am the way I am... the more I learn about autism, the more it explains me." Identifying as Autistic can even bring a sense of pride, improving self-esteem and self-image.

- 2. Realising you're not alone.** An autism diagnosis can be the gateway to connecting with the broader autism community, which fosters a sense of belonging, so Autistic people feel seen, heard and understood. It's also a great way to access resources and information.
- 3. Tapping into a support network.** A diagnosis can lead to a range of different supports, from disability services to work accommodations and tailored medical and mental health care.
- 4. Feeling empowered to self-advocate.** With an autism diagnosis, adults are better equipped to understand their own needs, and express these to others. You may find it's easier to bring up certain topics (such as your sensory needs) now there's a reason to validate them.

Is there a downside to an adult autism diagnosis?

The assessment and diagnosis process itself can be time-consuming, and expensive. Post-diagnosis, you may find it hard to find adult-specific services and support – and you may feel a conflicting mixture of emotions, such as relief, confusion, sadness or empowerment. For some, the benefits of getting a diagnosis outweigh any downsides.

Seeking formal diagnosis? The first step is to chat to your GP to get a referral to a clinical or neuropsychologist or psychiatrist with experience in assessing autism in adults.

Further reading

reframingautism.org.au/service/i-am-newly-diagnosed/
www.autismawareness.com.au/diagnosis/adults/getting-a-diagnosis
www.amaze.org.au/understand-autism/assessment-and-diagnosis/
thespectrum.org.au/autism-diagnosis/adults/