



# WHAT ARE PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS?

Pervasive developmental disorders (PDDs) are a group of neurologic and developmental disorders that share common symptoms, such as impaired social skills, communication deficits and characteristic behavioral changes. These disorders are separated into five subclasses, depending on patient presentation, symptoms and severity.

## Types of PDDs

- 1.) **Autistic Disorder (classic autism):** This disorder is indicated by the presence of abnormal or impaired development in social interaction and communication. Patients also display restricted activities and interests with signs of repetitive behavior, such as rocking, twirling or arm-flapping. Abnormalities leading to a diagnosis of autistic disorder are usually noted within the first two years of life.
- 2.) **Asperger Syndrome:** Symptoms vary in severity, but language and cognitive skills are usually retained. These patients usually have an average to above average IQ, but they often have impaired social skills or trouble interacting with others.
- 3.) **Rett's Disorder (or Rett Syndrome):** This disorder primarily occurs in females. Patients undergo normal early development, but after the first few months of life, head growth slows, followed by a loss of previously learned purposeful hand movements that are replaced by hand-wringing. They can be unsteady on their feet and are often severely mentally retarded. Patients can show transient improvements in social interaction, especially during the preschool years.
- 4.) **Childhood Disintegrative Disorder:** Patients display severe developmental regression, following at least two years of normal development.
- 5.) **Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified:** This is a diagnosis for patients who display some, but not all, features of autistic disorder or other PDDs.

## A Short Quiz about PDDs: True or False?

- 1.) Childhood vaccines cause autism.  
**FALSE**—A definitive cause for PDDs is still unknown, but there are some theories, such as genetics or exposure to environmental chemicals. Several large-scale studies have failed to find a link between PDDs, childhood vaccines (such as measles/mumps/rubella) and the mercury-based vaccine preservative thimerosal.
- 2.) There are more children with autism today.  
**TRUE**—However, PDDs were initially described in the 1940s and have gained the attention of health-care providers in the last few decades. No one knows why there has been an increase in the number of patients diagnosed, but it may be because of enhanced awareness, improved diagnostic criteria and better access to assistance programs.

## Want to learn more about PDDs?

Check these reliable websites for more information.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/)

Autism Society of America  
[www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer](http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer)

National Institute of Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm)

Autism Speaks  
[www.autismspeaks.org/index2.php](http://www.autismspeaks.org/index2.php)

*For more information, ask your pharmacist!*

*This information provided by the Michigan Pharmacists Association and:*

