Today’s piece was prepared by Chloe Douglas, MD, based on a New York Times article [The Search for a Biomarker for Early Autism Diagnosis](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/well/family/the-search-for-a-biomarker-for-early-autism-diagnosis.html).

This article addresses a frequent question that many primary care pediatricians hear from parents of toddlers: How do I know if my child has Autism? It is also quite easy for a non-medical caregiver to understand and explains various screening tools already in practice, including the M-CHAT and developmental milestone screening (with easy-to-click links). Two pediatricians who appear to be leaders in the field of ASD offer insight into the importance of early diagnosis and therapy for children with ASD, which adds to the article’s credibility and persuasiveness. After offering an overview of ASD and the current screening methods, the author and contributors discuss the frequency of late diagnoses due to lack of availability/long wait time to see specialty providers, in addition to delayed diagnosis for minority groups.

The study discussed analyzed 104 toddlers ranging from age 16-31 months for orienting in response to name calls while receiving visual stimulus on tablet. Only 8% of the toddlers with ASD oriented to name calling vs. 63% in the comparison group (p=0.002). The NYT author discusses thus that lack of response to name calls could be used as early biomarker fro ASD, especially in lower socioeconomic areas. However, this would not alleviate the need for evaluation by a specialist for a formal diagnosis and initiation in therapy and, thus, would likely not aid in earlier diagnosis from that standpoint. Also, although this lack of response seems to have some sensitivity, this could lead to increased parental concerns in a truly otherwise typically developing child, leading to over-evaluation. Overall, it is apparent that this question would be a good one to ask as a PCP when you have concern that a child may have ASD but is not diagnostic at this time.

**RESOURCES ON AUTISM:**

[Autism Society of America](http://www.autism-society.org/) National organization with professional Board, provides education, advocacy, and research

[Seattle Children’s Autism Resource Guide](https://www.seattlechildrens.org/clinics/autism-center/patient-family-resources/) *Excellent collection of many resources for families on a variety of topics*

**And, for purchase:**

[Autism Spectrum Disorder: What Every Parents Needs to Know](https://shop.aap.org/autism-spectrum-disorder-paperback/) *published by AAP, included in NYT article and written by pediatrician featured*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!