Today’s piece was prepared by Daniel Ryan, MS4, based on a NY Times story [The Search for a Biomarker for Early Autism Diagnosis: Children with ASD took significantly longer to look away from a video when their names were called, a new study found](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/22/well/family/the-search-for-a-biomarker-for-early-autism-diagnosis.html)

This article describes an effort to develop a ‘biomarker’ for autism, a computer vision analysis tool that measures how a child reacts when his or her name is called, encouraged by the difficulty in screening for and diagnosing autism in developing children, given the months or years of wait time for evaluations that apply the gold standard clinical evaluation. Compounding this challenge is lost opportunity during the wait time in providing treatment. Since early intervention may improve outcomes, an effective biomarker to expedite diagnosis would be extremely valuable.

**Critique:** This story was persuasive because it offers hope that diagnosis of autism (or reassurance that one’s child does not have autism) might possibly be obtained simply by taking video of your child. “The hope is eventually to make a tool that would be easily available … by having parents collect data on their phones.”

The article was not overly hopeful, however, because it was balanced by a description of extensive, multidisciplinary analysis to support a more reliable diagnosis. The article ended with the caveat that there are “no easy fixes” with autism. The reader is thus implicitly cautioned about hoping for an easy diagnosis.

The article reinforces the psychological (as opposed to biochemical) underpinnings of the diagnosis of autism, saying that autism is “by its nature a social communication disorder.” This is important because it may avoid creating false expectations that the diagnosis of autism will soon be confirmed (or ruled out) by a quick lab test.

**RESOURCES FOR PARENTS ON AUTISM:**

[What Causes Autism](https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-causes-autism) *Autism Speaks resource*[Autism diagnostic evaluation description](https://www.seattlechildrens.org/clinics/autism-center/services/diagnostic-evaluation/) *Seattle Children’s Autism Center description of a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary assessment*

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