Today’s piece was prepared by Maeve Woeltje, MD based on a New York Times story [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).

Early diagnosis and treatment for autism may improve language, cognition, social skills, and normalized brain activity. Although signs usually present as early as 12 to 24 months, average diagnostic age is 4 years despite early screening, due to long wait times for formal assessments, and disparity in access among children of ethnic or racial minority.

Researchers at the Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development are looking for biomarkers that could diagnose autism early. The group published [a study in the Journal of Autism](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=campbell+orient+to+name+autism) finding children with autism between 16-31 months old took longer than a control group to look away from a video and orient to a person calling their name. They hope to use this data to develop a low-cost and globally accessible tool to help parents assess for autism at home.

Autism is now diagnosed clinically by behavior and development experts via history and observation. The conversations after a diagnosis of autism can be often be quite complex. Outcomes are difficult to predict, particularly regarding younger children. Health care teams and families can build strong relationships in order to provide the best longitudinal care.

*Critique:*

The author does an excellent job explaining the importance of early autism diagnosis. She also concludes the article with a good summary of how autism is currently diagnosed and mentions the importance of building relationships with families. While the article hints at the complexity of diagnosing autism, it does not discuss the potential pitfalls of relying on a home-based method of diagnosis. Someone unfamiliar with autism may assume from this article that a diagnosis should be as simple as paying attention to how long a child looks at a screen.

**RESOURCES ON AUTISM:**

[Parent tools](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html) *for working with Autism (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)*

[Learn the Signs – Act Early Campaign](https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Autism/LearntheSigns) *Washington State Dep’t of Health*

[Autism Society](https://www.autism-society.org/)

[Autism navigator](https://autismnavigator.com/) *Aims to bridge the gap between practice and science*

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