

Spotlight on autism research

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Despite substantial gains in knowledge and understanding of autism over the last three years, we are still no closer to either prevention or cure, according to Sir Michael Rutter, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London. In a new study, Rutter reviews the latest scientific developments in the study of autism, published between 2007-2010. His paper is available online in Springer's *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Professor Rutter is the first consultant of child psychiatry in the United Kingdom. He has been described as the "father of child psychology."

His comprehensive paper discusses scientific progress in our understanding of [autism](#), in relation to four key areas of research: understanding of clinical features of the disorder; advances in genetics; progress in environmental research issues; and the state of play on psychological treatments.

'Genetic findings' delve into rare and pathogenic gene mutations; copy number variations; genome-wide association studies; and epigenetics. This section also poses two important questions: Why doesn't autism become extinct? Why haven't the [susceptibility genes](#) for autism been identified?

The last part of the paper, which looks at psychological treatments, highlights the debate around the value of very early behavioral treatment for recovery, as well as the new treatment method focused on improving parental sensitivity and responsiveness.

"Substantial gains in knowledge have been achieved during the last three years, and there have been some unexpected findings, but major puzzles remain. We should be hopeful of ever greater gains in the years ahead, but both prevention and cure remain elusive," says Professor Rutter.

More information: Rutter M (2011). Progress in understanding autism: 2007-2010. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. [DOI:10.1007/s10803-011-1184-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-011-1184-2)

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