

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: Pro Golfer Billy Mayfair Reveals Diagnosis

by Paul Arco
May 31 2021 7:25 AM



Billy Mayfair has enjoyed a long and successful career as a professional golfer, all while facing some health challenges off the course. The 54-year-old beat testicular cancer several years ago, and recently received a diagnosis that helps him understand some issues he has grappled with his entire life. In 2019, Mayfair was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause serious social, communications and behavioral issues. People with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from other people.

Autism spectrum disorder includes conditions that were once considered separate — autism, Asperger's syndrome, and childhood disintegrative disorder. There is no test for ASD and medical professionals make a diagnosis based on behavior and development.

“Autism Spectrum is when you think of a spectrum it’s going to be an array or a continuum of issues that may come across as to how one interacts with the environment,” says Dr. Syed Zaidi, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare. “So their inability to receive what’s coming at them and interpret and process back out to the environment may not be what you and I consider traditional.”

Signs of ASD begin during early childhood and can last throughout life. There are many symptoms, including:

- Repeating actions over and over again
- Trouble adapting to routine change
- Avoiding eye contact
- Difficulty relating to others
- Trouble expressing needs using typical words or motions

“Are you seeing repetitive movement, are you seeing ticks, tremors, there’s a word called echolalia, where they keep repeating the same words, and you don’t find any rhythm or pattern to it, but you can find triggers,” says Dr. Zaidi. “Those are some of the common signs we read in textbooks, but no individual is exactly textbook.”

Mayfair says his biggest issue is one of processing speed. He says his brain gets going so quickly that, “what I’m thinking and what comes out of my mouth could be two different things,” he told *Sports Illustrated*.

He is also known as a slow player on the course, which he attributes to how long it takes him to sort through information. When it came to dealing with the rules of golf, Mayfair would get frustrated or angry with golf officials. His wife even noticed how he never seemed to give her a hug and how easily flustered he became. It was all part of his ASD.

“His lack of social ability was another red flag,” says Dr. Zaidi. “So you put these pieces together and there’s something not right here. This gentleman, who wants to come out and function, is not able to. So you put him through the same battery of testing, the same

structured interviewing. Look at the quality of life and look at what is impaired with his functionality.”

There is no treatment for ASD. Research does show early intervention treatment services can improve a child’s development. For adults who are diagnosed later in life, the challenge is even greater.

“It is a spectrum and it is very wide and I don’t want any one individual to have a conviction this is what I have because I fit this profile,” says Dr. Zaidi. "Go through the structured series of testing, get a formal evaluation, and get maybe not one but two opinions, because this is a diagnosis that can shape the rest of your life and how you function within it.”

For more information on autism spectrum disorder, click [here](#).