

# **Resistance to temptation in toddlers at genetic risk for autism spectrum disorder**

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Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have difficulty controlling their behavior and impulses. At 22, 28, and 34 months, toddlers with an older sibling with ASD (referred to as 'high risk'; HR) and toddlers with typically-developing older siblings (referred to as 'low risk'; LR) were presented with an appealing toy and instructed not to touch it, in order to study how children's self-control changes across early childhood in typical children and those with emerging ASD. Observers coded whether or not children touched the toy and what behaviors they used to help them resist touching it. At 36 months children were assessed for ASD yielding 3 groups: HR children with ASD, HR children without ASD (HR-noASD), and LR children. At 22 months almost all children touched the forbidden toy, but by 28 months many HR-noASD and LR children were able to resist the temptation to touch the toy. In contrast at 28 and 34 months most of the children with a diagnosis of ASD by 36 months continued to play with the toy when instructed not to. Between 22 and 28 months the toddlers who did not receive a later diagnosis of ASD developed the ability to distract themselves by looking at pictures on the wall or themselves in the mirror as a way of resisting the temptation to touch the appealing toy. Results highlight one early index of impulse control that differentiates children with emerging ASD from age-mates prior to the third birthday.