

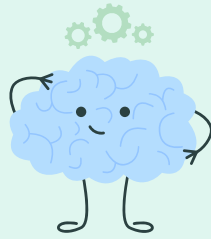
PLEASE
TAKE
ONE!

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER



WHY DOES ASD HAPPEN?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that is highly heritable (likely to be passed down from previous generations), but has no single known cause and involves many interacting influences. For individuals with ASD, brain development differences can be seen as early as in utero or in infancy, with variation in how brain regions communicate and how neurons are connected and organized. Your odds of having ASD are slightly increased if your parents are older, if your mother was severely ill during pregnancy, or if you experienced complications that affected early brain development. There is no evidence linking parental style, attachment or trauma (or vaccines) as causes of ASD. ASD is a neurodevelopmental difference that does not need to be cured, though some individuals benefit from support to reduce challenges and improve quality of life. (2)



About 1 in 44 Canadian children and youth live with ASD. (1)

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

Everyone with ASD experiences it differently. Many people with ASD experience sensory hypersensitivity with sounds, textures or lights, and social interactions can sometimes feel confusing or challenging. People with ASD can also have hyposensitivity, where a person may not notice or respond strongly to stimuli (pain, sound, or touch) and might seek out more intense sensory experiences to feel regulated. Most people with ASD prefer to have a predictable and ordered schedule and environment. Busy environments like school or the grocery store can sometimes feel chaotic or even physically uncomfortable. People with ASD can have intense interests that they find immersive and highly rewarding, occasionally to the exclusion of other things. Some people with ASD find stimming (repetitive movements or behaviours) to be grounding and helpful for managing stress or excitement. (3)

INTERVENTIONS

The aim of supports and interventions should be to help improve the quality of life and functioning for someone with ASD, not attempting to “cure” their ASD. Any supports should also be multidisciplinary and customized to the individual and their needs, which range from no support to high support needs.

Early developmental interventions can be especially helpful when it comes to communication and engagement, but supports can be impactful at any age.

Many people with ASD can benefit from caregiver coaching within the family, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) at school, or workplace accommodations. (4)

SLEEP

Many people with ASD find sleep to be challenging, with higher rates of insomnia, difficulties falling asleep, and more night wakings than others. This may be caused by a difficulty in shifting to a rest state, sensitivity to small sensory environmental factors, and increased anxiety or rumination.

For someone with ASD, sleep issues can increase their daytime sensory sensitivities, stress, irritability and executive functioning, so focusing on improving sleep can be key.

A few ways to improve sleep for someone with ASD is to keep to a consistent bedtime and wake-up time, to have a predictable wind-down time with limited stimulating input before bed, and reducing sensory triggers in their bedroom. (5)



A PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT

One of the most helpful things for someone with ASD can be having access to a supportive and predictable environment built to accommodate their innate traits and needs.

Creating a predictable routine with a clear structure to the day can often reduce anxiety and overwhelm. Many people with ASD find visual planners, schedules or written instructions to be helpful with this.

Making sure that their sensory needs are met where possible (or providing accommodations when they cannot be met) can be helpful. Scheduling downtime in the day for alone time and sensory breaks can be protective and help avoid burnout.

Life will always require some level of flexibility - but for someone with ASD, having their day structured to reduce unexpected changes can help a lot. (4)

EXERCISE

Regular movement or exercise can help reduce stress and improve emotion regulation. Some people with ASD find it also provides a calming or soothing sensory input. The good news? Exercise also improves sleep quality and attention! (6)



SUPPORT



A good first step is to get assessed for ASD, if you haven't already. Next, a Registered Clinical Counsellor who specializes in ASD can help work with you to improve quality of life, reduce distress, manage relationships, practice emotion regulation and gain support with your daily functioning.



LOVED ONES

If you care for someone with ASD, being consistent, patient and validating their experience can significantly reduce their stress and help improve their wellbeing.

One of the best things you can do for them is to learn their individual preferences, sensory needs and communication style. Whenever possible, ask what helps or hinders them, rather than assuming.

When you can, try to provide predictability, be clear and direct in your communication, and respect their routines. And don't forget to look after yourself, too!

MORE INFORMATION

1. <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/autism/>
2. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20352928>
3. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd.html>
4. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/framework-autism-canada.html>
5. <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/sleep-matters-ndds>
6. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/16/5/2492>

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24/7 HELP LINES - PHONE

1-800-SUICIDE	1-800-784-2433
Crisis Line / Mental Health Support	310-6789 (no area code needed)
Fraser Health Crisis Line	604-951-8855
Kids Help Line (BC)	310-1234 (no area code needed)
Kids Help Line (Canada)	1-800-668-6868
KUU-US Crisis Line (Aboriginal)	1-800-588-8717
VictimLink	1-800-563-0808
Youth Against Violence Line	1-800-680-4264
Child Protection Services BC	1-800-663-9122

TEXT OR ONLINE CHAT

YouthSpace (Text)	778-783-0177
Youth Against Violence (Text)	604-836-6381
youthinbc.com	Daily from 12pm - 1am
youthspace.ca	Daily from 6pm - 12am
kidshelpphone.ca	Wed - Sun, 3pm - 11pm

SUBSTANCE USE HELP

Alcohol and Drug Resources	604-660-9382
Pacific Community Resource Society	604-836-6273
Little House Society (Tsawwassen)	778-434-3119
Alcoholics Anonymous	604-434-3933
Narcotics Anonymous	604-873-1018

MENTAL WELLBEING APPS

BoosterBuddy
Calm
Headspace
Mindshift
MyLife