

Autism and ADHD (AuDHD)



Aspect offers autism, ADHD and cognitive assessments.

Autism and ADHD are both brain-based differences that fall under the broad umbrella of neurodivergence. They often co-occur, although the exact proportion of Autistic people who also have ADHD is not yet known, with estimates varying greatly (ranging from 22% up to 83%). This overlap can make it harder for clinicians to recognise when both conditions are present.

Historical context

Until 2013, it was not possible to be diagnosed with both Autism and ADHD simultaneously due to the constraints of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM-5, introduced in 2013, allowed for the co-diagnosis of these conditions, reflecting a growing understanding of their overlap.

Common features of both ADHD and autism

- **Stimming and fidgeting:** Repetitive movements or behaviours used to self-soothe or manage sensory input.
- **Hyper-focus:** Intense absorption in activities of interest, often to the exclusion of other tasks.
- **Sensory differences:** Heightened sensitivity to sensory inputs like sounds, lights, and textures.
- **Impulse control differences:** Challenges in regulating impulses, which may lead to spontaneous actions.
- **Emotional regulation:** Variability in managing emotions, potentially leading to intense emotional experiences.

- **Increased risk of victimisation:** Higher vulnerability to bullying and other forms of mistreatment due to social differences.
- **Special interests and passions:** Deep, focused interests in specific topics or activities.
- **Task-switching challenges:** Difficulties with transitioning from one activity to another.
- **Masking:** Efforts to hide or minimise differences to conform to societal expectations.
- **Eye contact differences:** Variations in eye contact, such as avoiding it or making intense eye contact.
- **Sleep differences:** Challenges with falling asleep, staying asleep, or achieving restful sleep.
- **Social differences:** Unique approaches to social interactions, understanding social cues, and forming relationships.

Whilst these traits can often look similar, the exact nature of these may differ, including the causes behind these behaviours, so it's important to have an accurate diagnoses, whereby a clinician can go through these traits in detail.



Opposing traits and internal conflicts

- **Routine vs. spontaneity:** Autistic individuals typically prefer order and routine, while those with ADHD may struggle with organisation and prefer spontaneity. This can lead to internal conflicts and distress.
- **Organisational challenges:** The need for organisation (common in Autism) clashes with difficulties in maintaining it (common in ADHD).
- **Special interests duration:** The nature of special interests may vary, with Autistic individuals often having long-standing interests, while those with ADHD may experience intense but short-lived interests.

Mental health and functional challenges

Autistic individuals with ADHD (AuDHD) may be more likely to experience mental health conditions like depression and anxiety compared to those with only one of these conditions. They may also encounter greater challenges in daily functioning due to compounded executive function differences, affecting planning, organisation, attention, and impulse regulation.

Support considerations

- **ADHD medications:** These can be effective for managing ADHD in Autistic individuals.
- **Non-pharmacological treatments:** Psychological or occupational therapy, psychoeducation, and tailored support strategies can be beneficial.
- **Personalised support:** The specific combination and order of treatments should be personalised based on the individual's current needs and functioning.

Understanding the intersection of Autism and ADHD is crucial for providing effective support and fostering an inclusive environment where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

Useful Resources

ADHD and Autism

autistica.org.uk/what-is-autism/adhd-and-autism

What is AuDHD?

theconversation.com/what-is-audhd-5-important-things-to-know-when-someone-has-both-autism-and-adhd-233095

Understanding AuDHD

attwoodandgarnettevents.com/understanding-audhd

