



OAASIS INFORMATION SHEET

Medical implications for a pupil with Asperger Syndrome / Autism and similar conditions

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There are no inherent medical implications for a child with Asperger Syndrome or autism that would cause problems in a mainstream school.

However, there are associated features of the disorder that might cause problems.

Many children with autism have a hypersensitive or hyposensitive **sensory acuity**:

Hearing: some may have such sensitive hearing that they will cover their ears at the slightest noise; while another will appear to be deaf.

Sight: one child may be extremely sensitive to bright lights. Some may have visual attention difficulties.

Touch: some will be sensitive to anything but the lightest touch, finding, for example, all clothing except soft, tracksuit style materials, itchy and uncomfortable. Some will not like to be touched by other people and will draw away, while others enjoy, for example, stroking animals.

Smell: some may be highly sensitive, or others totally insensitive, to smells.

Taste: one child may be a very fussy eater (no 'lumps'; or will not accept any food that has been prepared, or in any way touched by others). Some may suffer from *pica*, when everything is placed in the mouth and 'eaten' – leaves, stones, pencils, clothing, nails, paper, etc.

Movements: some children may love or hate certain movements, such as those experienced on swings, roundabouts, etc. Many children will repeat movements such as hand-flapping, rocking, jumping, and hopping.

Anxiety: older children in particular can be prone to psychiatric problems caused by depression, loneliness and low self-esteem. Enuresis, self-mutilation, and mood swings may result. See the OAASIS Information Sheet on Anxiety.

Curiosity and lack of empathy may lead to injury to self or others: "What will happen if I squeeze this drinking glass?" "What will happen if I jump out of the window?" "I did not think it would hurt her as she wasn't looking at me when I did it."

Epilepsy: adolescent onset is not uncommon.

Pain: some children may exhibit over-high pain thresholds. They will not complain of conditions that might have non-ASD children in tears. A difficult one to monitor, but any physical accident should be checked carefully as a matter of course by a school nurse or hospital casualty department.

Personal hygiene may be a problem with some children: a fear of bacteria and bugs will prevent them touching the 'dirty bits' in order to make them clean. In a residential setting, carers must check that genitals and hair are being washed regularly and carefully. An offshoot of this may result in a faddy food eater: ie the young person will not touch or eat anything that has been touched by others. He may happily accept pre-packed foods, however, as long as he himself is the one who undoes the packaging, and he may cope quite happily with food brought from home.

Other syndromes which may coexist with autism / AS and which in their own right may require some form of regular medication:

- **ADHD*** - excellent UK org ADDISS' website is at www.addiss.co.uk Tel: 020 8952 2800
- **Cerebral Palsy*** - SCOPE's website is at www.scope.org.uk Tel: 0808 800 3333
- **Epilepsy*** – the Epilepsy Action website is at www.epilepsy.org.uk Tel: 0808 800 5050
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*** – OCD Action website is at www.ocdaction.org.uk Tel: 0845 390 6232
- **Tourette's Syndrome*** - Tourette's Syndrome (UK) Association website is at www.tsa.org.uk Tel: 0845 458 1252

Other conditions often seen with AS (but not necessarily requiring medication):

Dyslexia* - The British Dyslexia Association's website is at www.bdadyslexia.org.uk (Tel: 0845 251 9002)

Dyspraxia* - (Developmental Coordination Disorder, or 'Clumsy Child Syndrome'). This gives difficulties with fine and/or gross motor skills, as well as in some cases problems with both verbal and mental coordination. Because of their 'clumsiness', many young people with AS will dislike games and sports and will often be the last to be chosen if teams are being picked. The Dyspraxia Foundation's website is at www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/ (Tel: 01462 454 986).

Face-Blindness ('prosopagnosia') - Not a common one, but has been known to co-exist with autistic spectrum conditions and particularly Asperger Syndrome. The condition makes the recognition of an individual's face very difficult. USA Website at: www.choisser.com/faceblind.

Semantic Pragmatic Disorder* - This disorder is now thought to be part of the autistic continuum. Children with abnormal social skills but relatively normal communication would be thought of as having Asperger Syndrome; those with relatively good social relationships but verbal communication problems would be diagnosed as having SPD. Some experts in the field believe that the two conditions should be seen and treated as one and the same. Find more information at the Surrey NAS website www.mugsy.org/spd5.htm, Afasic's website www.afasic.org.uk (Tel: 0845 355 5577) and www.spdsupport.org.uk.

Hyperlexia – a disorder of reading development, disordered language, social and behaviour problems (www.ability.org.uk/hyperlex.html); **Developmental Apraxia of Speech** – neurologically-based, affects speech development, the number and combination of sounds a child masters (www.ability.org.uk/Apraxia.html); **Irlen Syndrome** – visual perception problem, coloured glasses needed (www.irlen.org.uk/).

** OAASIS produces free Information Sheets on these conditions.*

Cambian Education Services run seven residential special schools and colleges for young people with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger Syndrome/HFA, severe learning difficulties. OAASIS can give you advice on the schools and send you their prospectuses or visit the website www.cambianeducation.com. OAASIS produces a wide range of **free Information Sheets**, 8 **publications** entitled 'First Guide to...' and **wallet sized cards** explaining 9 learning disabilities. Please contact OAASIS (see front of sheet for contact details) for the full list, or view and download them on the website at www.oaasis.co.uk. All sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the current version.

Note: The OAASIS Information Sheets use 'he' 'his' 'him' rather than the cumbersome 'he / she' 'his / her' 'him / her'. No sexism is intended. The sheets are checked annually; please ensure you have the current version.