

Autism Editions

July 2026|

Volume 2, Number 3: Autism and Physical Health Conditions



**Autism and Physical Health
Conditions**

**Research/ insights and
signposting**

**Helpful resources and
shared experiences**

Greater Manchester
Autism Consortium

Contact:

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Email: GMAC@nas.org.uk

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Welcome to the Autism Editions on Autism and Physical Health conditions

We wanted to do this edition, as recently we have started to learn more about some of the co-occurring physical health conditions that many autistic people experience. This is happening across the age range but has been particularly discussed in the GM Autism and Older age focus group that we run as well as on the online support group that we coordinate and host. These physical health conditions include conditions such as auto-immune conditions, gut and GI issues, migraines and headaches to name but a few. We are grateful to our contributors to this edition and for sharing personal stories and experiences. As ever, we can not do this without you.

If you are struggling with your physical and mental health currently, we wish you well and know that we know much needs to be done to improve things!

Mari Saeki



Looking Beyond Behaviour: Why Physical Health Matters in Autism

(Some context)

Abigail Gibson

Autism is often described in terms of communication differences, social interaction and sensory processing. These are important, but they do not capture the full picture. Research increasingly shows that autistic people are also more likely to experience a range of physical health conditions that can significantly affect daily life.

These can include gastrointestinal disorders, epilepsy, sleep problems, chronic pain, migraines, hypermobility and connective tissue conditions such as Ehlers-Danlos syndromes, immune-related conditions, and for some autistic women and people assigned female at birth, gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis and PCOS.

UK clinical guidance reflects this broader view. NICE recommends that assessments for autistic adults consider both physical and mental health needs, supporting a more joined-up approach to care.

Health Conditions More Common in Autistic People

Research consistently shows higher rates of:

- Gastrointestinal conditions
- Epilepsy
- Sleep disorders
- Migraine
- Chronic pain
- Hypermobility and Ehlers-Danlos syndromes
- Immune-related conditions
- Certain gynaecological conditions



Organisations such as Autistica also highlight significant health inequalities, including poorer health outcomes and barriers to accessing care.

This does not mean every autistic person will have these conditions. It means symptoms should be taken seriously and properly investigated rather than assumed to be part of autism.

Pain and Communication Differences

Pain is experienced and expressed differently across autistic people. Some experience heightened sensitivity, while others may not recognise or communicate pain in expected ways.

Differences in interoception (internal body awareness) and communication can make it harder to identify or describe symptoms. As a result, medical issues may go unnoticed for longer than in the general population.

Changes in sleep, appetite, energy or behaviour can sometimes be key signs of underlying illness.

Diagnostic Overshadowing

A major barrier in healthcare is diagnostic overshadowing, where physical symptoms are wrongly attributed to autism.

This can lead to delayed diagnosis or missed medical conditions, especially when symptoms such as fatigue, pain or dizziness are dismissed as anxiety or “just autism.”

Clinical guidance is clear: autism should never replace medical investigation. New or changing symptoms always require proper assessment.

Looking Beyond Behaviour: Why Physical Health Matters in Autism

(Some context continued)

Abigail Gibson

Interoception and Access to Care

Many autistic people experience differences in interoception, affecting awareness of internal signals such as hunger, thirst, pain or fatigue.

This can make it harder to notice illness early or explain symptoms clearly in appointments. Adjustments such as clear language, extra time and written symptom notes can significantly improve access to care.

Why These Conditions Co-occur

There is no single explanation. Current research suggests multiple contributing factors, including genetics, immune function, connective tissue differences, autonomic nervous system regulation and environmental influences.

While research is ongoing, the direction is clear: physical health needs to be considered alongside neurological differences.

Moving Forward

Improving healthcare for autistic people means listening carefully, avoiding assumptions and investigating symptoms thoroughly. A more integrated approach can reduce delays in diagnosis and improve quality of care.

Understanding autism means understanding the whole person and not just behaviour, but physical health too.

References:

NICE: Autism spectrum disorder in adults (CG142) <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg142>

NICE: Autism quality standard (QS51) <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs51>

NHS: Autism overview <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/>

Autistica: Health and health inequalities research <https://www.autistica.org.uk>

National Autistic Society: Health and wellbeing <https://www.autism.org.uk>



Am I The Only Autistic Adult with Chronic Health Conditions?

By Gina Topliff Frost

To answer this question, I will reference my own physical health conditions; some of them at least. I have been researching for some time to collate facts beyond my own situation and for the purpose of my book, *'Desperately Seeking Safety.'* This is intended to reach the *'Lost Girls of Autism'* and the world of neurodiversity, science and education.

At aged 58 I was diagnosed as autistic. In the same year I was diagnosed with chronic pancreatitis. I had a shunt fitted to manage my hydrocephalus. It was diagnosed 2006 alongside hemiplegic migraine and epilepsy. The latter and CP are proven to be genetic.

1. Research by Dr Elizabeth Weir of the Research Centre in Cambridge, found that the survey her team conducted 'assessed 60 physical health conditions across nine different organs'.
2. Dr John Ward a visiting research scientist at the Autism Research Centre in Cambridge said: 'This research adds to the body of evidence that the healthcare needs of autistic people are greater than those of non-autistic people'.
3. Professor Sir Simon Baron Cohen, Director of ARC said: 'We are aware of the risks of mental health conditions in ASC. [But this research identifies their risks of physical health conditions too](#)'.

As part of my research and reading it was [The Lost Girls of Autism](#) by Gina Rippon and [Invisible Women](#) by Caroline Criado Perez that exposed me to the further neglect of autistic women, who were once girls and not considered to be autistic. Many may be elderly, retired or dead.

As a child I often felt ill but was ignored. A lifetime of ignored illness and symptoms added pressure to my genetic conditions.

Being chastised for my social behaviour, I felt I was living in a cruel world where I did not belong. It led to complex post traumatic stress disorder. A diagnosis the same time as the earlier conditions mentioned. My mental health throughout my life had been impaired by hallucinations.

In retirement I have retreated from a world not made for me. Education and science can change this. Life and my incessant desire to live and be well has been hampered by my medical needs. Former Health Secretary Wes Streeting has said:

['medical misogyny is a major flaw in the health service and women have been badly let down'](#).



Autism and Endometriosis:

Learning to Manage a Condition That No One Else Could

Abigail Gibson

Being autistic means I have always experienced my body differently. Like many autistic people, I am acutely aware of changes in how I feel, yet I have also experienced the frustration of having those concerns dismissed or reduced to a limited set of treatment options. Living with endometriosis has only amplified those experiences.

For me, the most difficult part has not been receiving the diagnosis, it has been learning to live with the condition afterwards.

When I sought support through my GP, I found that the treatment options available to me were very limited. The main recommendations were long-term hormonal contraception or surgery. While these options are effective for many people and absolutely have an important place in endometriosis care, neither felt right for me.

I had previously taken the contraceptive pill and experienced significant side effects, including overwhelming fatigue, excessive drowsiness and rapid weight gain. Rather than helping me regain control of my life, I felt as though I was trading one set of symptoms for another.

Surgery also felt like an option that came with uncertainty. Although surgery can provide significant relief for many people with endometriosis, there is no guarantee that symptoms will not return, and repeat procedures are not uncommon. Personally, I was not prepared to undergo surgery without first exploring every other avenue available to me.

Living with endometriosis means living with inflammation almost every day. Bloating has become part of my normal life, and there are times when pain and exhaustion affect even simple daily activities. As an autistic person, these physical symptoms are often accompanied by sensory challenges that are rarely discussed.

Heavy menstrual bleeding can create significant sensory distress. The constant awareness of discomfort, changes in clothing, worries about leakage and the physical sensation of pads or other menstrual products can become overwhelming, particularly when combined with severe pain and fatigue. Yet these experiences are rarely acknowledged during medical appointments, despite having a profound impact on daily life.

Over time, I realised that if I wanted to improve my quality of life, I would need to take an active role in managing my condition myself.

Today, my routine focuses on reducing inflammation and supporting my overall health. I eat a largely whole-food diet, take supplements that I have researched carefully, prioritise regular movement and strength train four times each week. Heavy weightlifting has become an important part of my routine, alongside walking wherever possible and finding opportunities to increase my daily movement.

None of these approaches have cured my endometriosis. I still experience pain, inflammation and difficult days. However, they have helped me feel stronger, more resilient and more in control of my symptoms than I ever did relying solely on treatments that were not working for me.

Alongside these lifestyle changes, I chose to seek advice from private healthcare professionals and practitioners offering complementary approaches to symptom management. This decision was a personal one. While these approaches should never replace evidence-based medical care, I found that having practitioners who listened to my experiences, explored lifestyle factors and worked with me as an individual made a significant difference to how supported I felt.



Autism and Endometriosis:

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Perhaps that is what has been missing most throughout my journey, not simply additional treatments, but genuine partnership.

As autistic people, we are often encouraged to advocate for ourselves, yet self-advocacy becomes exhausting when it feels as though you are constantly trying to convince others that your pain is real. Physical symptoms do not become less important because someone is autistic. Likewise, sensory challenges, chronic fatigue and the emotional impact of living with a long-term condition deserve recognition alongside the medical diagnosis itself.

I do not believe there is a single approach that works for everyone with endometriosis. Hormonal treatments and surgery can be life-changing for many people, and those options should remain available. Equally, there should be room for conversations about nutrition, exercise, inflammation, pain management, mental wellbeing and lifestyle adjustments as part of a truly holistic model of care.

Living with both autism and endometriosis has taught me that healthcare is at its best when professionals listen, respect individual experiences and recognise that treatment is not only about reducing symptoms, it's about helping people live the fullest life possible.

I am still learning what works for me. But today, I feel healthier, stronger and more informed than I did when I was first diagnosed. That progress has come not from finding a cure, but from finding a way of managing my condition that respects both my physical health and my autistic identity.

Support and Information Resources:

If you would like further information or support around endometriosis, these UK organisations may help:

Endometriosis UK

<https://www.endometriosis-uk.org>

National charity offering information, helpline support, and local support groups for people living with endometriosis.

NHS – Endometriosis information

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/endometriosis/>

Official NHS guidance covering symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options available in the UK.

The Eve Appeal

<https://eveappeal.org.uk>

UK gynaecological health charity raising awareness of conditions including endometriosis and supporting early diagnosis.

Versus Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org>

Provides support for chronic pain, inflammation, fatigue management, pacing strategies, and movement advice.

National Autistic Society

<https://www.autism.org.uk>

Information on autism and healthcare access, including sensory needs and reasonable adjustments in medical settings.

Resources and reading

Autism, Food and Restrictive Eating

A useful lived-experience piece comes from **James Ward-Sinclair**, an autistic writer who runs the blog Autistic and Unapologetic. His work often focuses on how autism is understood in everyday life, particularly where it overlaps with health, identity, and support systems.



In this post on autism and restrictive eating, he explores how food-related difficulties in autistic people are often more complex than they first appear. Rather than being driven purely by weight or body image, restrictive eating can be linked to sensory sensitivities, anxiety, difficulties with interoception (recognising internal bodily signals like hunger), and a strong need for predictability or control.

He also highlights how these experiences are frequently misunderstood or mislabelled, particularly when professionals apply a standard eating disorder framework without considering neurodivergent differences. This can lead to gaps in understanding around why eating patterns develop and what support might actually be helpful.

The article takes a more contextual approach, focusing on what sits underneath eating behaviour rather than treating the behaviour itself as the whole issue.

Read the full post here:

<https://autisticandunapologetic.com/2019/02/24/autism-food-eating-disorders-overcoming-restrictive-eating/>



The Neurodivergent Experience

This podcast regularly explores how autism and ADHD overlap with physical health conditions such as Ehlers-Danlos syndromes (EDS), chronic pain, fatigue, burnout, and nervous system dysregulation. Episodes often focus on how these conditions interact in real life rather than treating them separately.

<https://shows.acast.com/the-neurodivergent-experience>



Liv Label Free Podcast

Hosted by autistic advocate Livia Sara, this podcast focuses on neurodivergent eating disorder recovery. It explores how autism and ADHD can shape eating behaviours through sensory processing differences, interoception, control, and anxiety, and how recovery approaches may need to be adapted.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/liv-label-free-neurodivergent-eating-disorder-recovery/id1574039759>



Divergent Conversations Podcast

Hosted by neurodivergent mental health professionals, this podcast includes discussions on autism, ADHD, eating disorders, and mental health from both clinical and lived-experience perspectives. Some episodes directly explore the overlap between autism and eating disorders.

<https://www.divergentpod.com>



Autism and Eating Disorders

Zoom workshop

DATE: 01.10.2026

TIME: 10:30-12:00

TICKETS: £20



Janina Brede

Janina is a Clinical Psychologist and researcher with a particular interest in the intersection of autism and eating disorders. She currently works within a NHS CAHMS eating disorder service. Prior to her clinical training, she completed a PhD as part of the Study of Eating Disorders in Autistic Females (SEDAF) research project at UCL. Her doctoral research focused on identifying factors that might contribute to the development and maintenance of restrictive eating difficulties for autistic people, as well as examining their experiences in healthcare services to inform improvements to support.



Finty Royle

Finty, a 5th-year medical student, received an autism diagnosis at 16 after years of struggling with anorexia. This diagnosis proved pivotal in her recovery, and she now recognises that many of the autistic traits that once posed challenges have ultimately contributed to her success.

For more information and to book, visit: <https://autismahandsonapproach.co.uk/EDworkshop/>

GROW IN CONFIDENCE IN YOUR AUTISM

The **Greater Manchester Autism Consortium** is hosting an online support group, exclusively for autistic adults, to allow them to meet other people, discuss matters of general interest, and share their experiences and ideas.

Meetings are held virtually on Zoom - usually on the 3rd Thursday of each month.

Numbers for each meeting will be limited to 20, and places can be booked on a first-come first-served basis on the **National Autistic Society's** Eventbrite listings. If you wish to attend but are unable to access Eventbrite, please contact Abigail (details below) to reserve a place.

Meetings are held monthly on the third Thursday of each month from 6.30 to 8.30pm.

The group administrators are:

Mark Simpson – mark.simpson@nas.org.uk

Abigail Gibson: abigail.gibson@nas.org.uk

Mark can be contacted on 07876746403 if you don't have access to email.

Please book on via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/grow-confidence-in-your-autism-2025-series-3942543?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=creatorshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=odclxcollection&utm-source=cp&aff=esch>





Parent/ Carer Forums in Greater Manchester

Parent carer forums are groups of parents and carers of disabled children who work with local authorities, education, health and other providers to make sure the services they plan and deliver, meet the needs of disabled children aged between 0-25 years and their families.

BOLTON

Bolton Parent Carers

<https://www.boltonparents.org.uk>

Telephone: 07715 201798

Email: info@boltonparents.org.uk

BURY

BURY2GETHER

<https://www.bury2gether.co.uk/>

Email: bury2gether@gmail.com

MANCHESTER

Manchester Parent Carer Forum

<http://manchesterparentcarerforum.org.uk/>

Email: info@manchesterparentcarerforum.org.uk

OLDHAM

Parent Carer Forum: Point

<https://www.point-send.co.uk/>

Telephone: 0161 503 1547

Email: admin@point-send.co.uk

ROCHDALE

Parent Carer Voice

<https://rochdaleparentcarersvoice.co.uk/>

Email: RochdalePCV@outlook.com

Telephone: 01706 358 326

SALFORD

Salford Parent Forum

Email: info@salfordpcf.com

STOCKPORT

Parents and Carers together (PACT)

<https://pactstockport.co.uk/>

Email: info@pactstockport.co.uk

TAMESIDE

Our Kids Eyes (OKE)

<https://www.ourkidseyes.org/>

Telephone: 0161 342 5550

TRAFFORD

<https://traffordparentsforum.org/>

Email: hello@traffordparentsforum.org

WIGAN

<https://www.wiganpcf.org.uk/>

Email: admin@wiganpcf.org.uk

Telephone: 07719 330602

Parent Support groups and services aimed at parents and carers of autistic children and adults.

BOLTON

Breaking Barriers

Tel: 07717434840

Email: breakbarriers3@gmail.com

Bolton Adult Autism Support (BAAS)

Tel: 07772547158

Email: enquiries@BoltonAdultAutismSupport.org.uk

Kidz2gether

Tel: 01204 669821

Email: info@kidz2gether.org.uk

BURY

Bury Autism Parent Society (BAPS)

Tel: 0161 761 0132

Email: bapsonline@yahoo.co.uk

www.baps-online.com

MANCHESTER

Chinese Carers of Autistic Children Group

Contact: Helen Chow Tel: 0161 228 0138

Grange School Parents Group

Tel: 0161 231 2590

Email: s.evans01@grange@manchester.sch.uk

MANCHESTER SOUTH

Carers Manchester South

Supports carers of autistic adults

Via online Zoom meetings:

cmsouth@manchestercarersforum.org.uk

OLDHAM

OSCA

Tel: 07365 772 711

Email: ocsaoldham@gmail.com

ROCHDALE

Rochdale Homestart Parent Support Group & Sam's SIBS Sibling Group

Tel: 01706 629 651 and 01706 436 143

Email: sam.hsr@gmail.com

www.homestartrochdale.org.uk

The Recovery Republic Well-Being Centre/ Autism and Asperger's Parents Group

Contact: Carina Jackson Tel: 01706 622 722

OR 07771523775

Email: carina.jackson@icloud.com in-
fo@recoveryrepublic.co.uk

www.recoveryrepublic.co.uk

Salford Action for Autism

Email: kayjones000@googlemail.com or
lou26@live.co.uk

<http://salfordactionforautism.simpl.com/index.html>

STOCKPORT

Stockport Carers for Adults on the Autistic Spectrum (SCAAS) They are a self-help group providing support and social activities for carers of adults on the autistic spectrum.

Website: <https://stockportadvocacy.co.uk/scaasstockport-carers-for-adults-on-the-autisticspectrum/>

Email scaascarergroup@gmail.com

Telephone 0161 480 8979

Autisk

<https://www.autisk.co.uk/>

Email: enquiry@autisk.co.uk

Telephone: 07376 341092

TAMESIDE

TASCA

<https://www.facebook.com/TascaTameside>

Telephone: 07754 873480

Tameside autism community group

<https://www.tameside-autism-community.org.uk/>

Autism support for Tameside and Glossop

<https://autismtameside.wordpress.com/>

Telephone: 0161 366 2050

TRAFFORD

Autism Trafford

<http://www.autismtrafford.co.uk/>

(Online contact page)

WIGAN

Embrace Wigan and Leigh

<https://www.embracewiganandleigh.org.uk/>

Email: info@embracewiganandleigh.org.uk

Telephone: (01942)233323

Autistic Adult Support Groups and services

The below contacts are a mixture of support groups, support services and advocacy specifically in relation to autistic adults. Please be aware that services differ greatly depending on the GM location.

BOLTON

Autism Spectrum Conditions Support Team
(Those who are diagnosed with Autism/Asperger's are offered a package of short-term support, depend-ing on need.)

Telephone: 01204 483000

<https://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/autism-spectrum-conditions-support-team/>

Bolton Adult Autism Support- a charity that runs social activities and befriending

<https://www.boltonadultautismsupport.org.uk/>

Breaking Barriers NW is another charity that runs social activities

<https://www.breakingbarriersnw.com/>

BURY

United Response run some social activities in Bury

<https://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/support-area/greater-manchester-bury/>

MANCHESTER

I AM AUTISM

This is a charity that runs some social activities.

<https://i-am-autism.org.uk/>

Email: enquiries@i-am-autism.org.uk

Telephone: 0161 866 8483

OLDHAM

Advocacy and support for people with autism and or Learning Disability.

<https://www.actiontogether.org.uk/community-activities/community-activity-directory/107754>

ROCHDALE

I AM AUTISM

<https://i-am-autism.org.uk/>

Email: enquiries@i-am-autism.org.uk

Telephone: 0161 866 8483

SALFORD

[Services in Salford | Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS FT](#)

STOCKPORT

Stockport Advocacy: Group 48 and Autism Social Group are run by Disability Stockport

. For more information, please contact Disability Stockport.

0161 4807248

TAMESIDE

Autism In Mind (TAIM)- TAIM takes place every other Tuesday at Tameside, Oldham and Glossop MIND, Katherine Street, Ashton from 4pm until 6pm. For more information call 0161 330 9223, or

email peersupport@togmind.org

Please the following link for information on peer support groups for autistic people and carers in Tameside: [Tameside.gov.uk/autism](https://tameside.gov.uk/autism)

Email: peersupport@togmind.org

Telephone: 0161 330 9223

TRAFFORD

Autism Trafford runs a social group with various activities for autistic adults.

Tel: 0161 357 1210

Email: jane.forrest1@nhs.net

WIGAN

Wigan Autism Engagement Group-A group to meet new people, talk about your experiences using services in Wigan and help make change. [Community - Autism Friendly \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://wigan.gov.uk/Community-Autism-Friendly)

Autism Friends Coffee Group- At the Armed Forces Community HQ, the Autism Friends Coffee Group. Have a brew, chat, play games, socialise and make new friends.

[Community - Autism Friendly \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://wigan.gov.uk/Community-Autism-Friendly)

My:ND Space CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Leigh, Greater Manchester. We are a peer led, supportive space for Adults and Teenagers with Autism, ADHD or any other Neurodivergent condition. No formal diagnosis is needed. We're a safe and supportive community, led by and for Neurodivergent people.

<https://www.myndspace.co.uk>

Spectrum Social Inclusivity-A small group dedicated to offering supported events for adults in Wigan. We started in 2016 and have continued to work towards our goal of ensuring everyone has somewhere they feel welcome and included.

[Spectrum Social Facebook page](#)

RESPECT FOR ALL GROUPS (GM AREA)

They currently offer two types of groups:

Autism Awareness Groups and Themed Peer Support Groups

<https://www.respectforall.org.uk/counselling-services-make-a-referral-copy>

Support services that cover the Greater Manchester area (autistic adults, autistic children and parents/ carers)



I AM AUTISM have various support services available. They are a UK registered charity working with and supporting a wide range of people, aged 10 years and upwards, who have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (which can also be called Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism or Autistic Spectrum Disorder) as well as their families, guardians and carers in Greater Manchester.

Website: <https://i-am-autism.org.uk/>

Email: enquiries@i-am-autism.org.uk

Telephone: 0161 866 8483



Respect For All offer counselling for autistic people, for people with learning disabilities, and for their families, throughout the whole of Greater Manchester.

Website: <https://www.respectforall.org.uk/counselling/>

Contact number: 0161 532 4075



GMAC aims to be a point of contact for anyone in Greater Manchester needing information about autism and related issues. We are managed by the UK's leading charity for autistic people and their families [The National Autistic Society](#). To find out more visit our [About us](#) page.

Since 1993 we have been providing information and advice to autistic people and their families, delivering training and developing resources. In 2019 we launched Greater Manchester's first [Autism Strategy](#) to help create a region that works better for autistic people.

Website: <https://www.autismgm.org.uk/>

With the nature of support groups and services, they change often so please let us know if you are aware of anything that is not listed and we will add these to our contacts.