

# Myths

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## Diagnosis, Labels, Treatment and Cures

### **There's so many people being diagnosed these days**

It's important to consider that we've been learning and becoming more aware of Autism and how it presents, especially with the increased use of social media. Autism has long been misunderstood and viewed in a negative light and as this starts to change, it is to be expected that more people will pursue a diagnosis. It is also important to understand that Diagnosis of autism as an umbrella condition is relatively new so we will start to see an increased use of this label over the separation of diagnoses.

### **You can't be autistic if you don't have a diagnosis**

For many people, a diagnosis is a privilege. Getting a diagnosis can cost thousands of dollars if you cannot get it through the public system and getting it through the public system isn't always an option. Wait times can be years to get an assessment.

Females and people of colour are also significantly more likely to go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed.

Getting diagnosed as an adult is also a lot harder than getting diagnosed as a child, especially if you learn to mask or find tools and ways to cope. And for some, especially in adulthood, there really is no benefit in getting a formal diagnosis. It's a personal journey that is different for everyone.

Autism is a neurotype. You are either autistic or you're not. You don't suddenly become autistic when you receive your diagnosis. You always have been autistic regardless of if or when you get a paper telling you so.

## **Labelling them will only limit them**

Even if an autistic or neurodivergent person does not know that they are neurodivergent, they will still know they are different in some way. We often feel like we don't belong or like we're from another planet entirely.

We will still be getting piled with labels every day; lazy, rude, disrespectful, weird, loner, awkward... Without knowing that we're neurodivergent, these negative labels build up as our own failure to succeed or keep up with everyone else when in actuality, our brains are wired differently, and we need different tools or accommodations to operate.

It's like not knowing that everyone else has the ability to be in multiple places at once, and then constantly getting berated for how useless you are because you don't get nearly as much done as they do.

Feeling out of place, feeling like a failure, and constantly being labelled negatively eventually takes a significant toll on a person's wellbeing and that will limit them far more than a label that explains everything and potentially helps them find others like them.

## **They're just using it as an excuse**

Autism, neurodivergence, disability, illness, or anything of the sort is not an excuse, it's an explanation. No, it doesn't mean you can get away with doing whatever you want, but a lot of the time people get told they're using their diagnoses as an excuse when they're just explaining why they might be presenting a certain way. And often that presentation is okay to just accept and/or accommodate. A person with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome may not have the energy to participate in a high energy sport, that is an explanation, not an excuse. In the same way, an autistic person may not pick up on implications and that may be interpreted as being rude. That is a miscommunication between neurotypes. Being autistic explains why that person might have missed a neurotypical form of communication. The responsibility shouldn't fall solely on the autistic person to translate everything they think, say, or do when a bit of understanding on both sides can ease a lot of that burden.

## **“They’ll grow out of it”**

Autism is a lifelong neurotype, not something that children will grow out of. Autistic children turn into autistic adults. While some people learn to hide or mask their traits, or find skills to cope with certain challenges, it's just not possible to grow out of the structural and developmental differences of our brains. Just like neurotypicals who behave differently when they are children than when they are adults, many autistic people do the same. We grow up, we don't grow out of it. It's not something that needs to be grown out of.

## **You can “cure” autism via diet, vitamins etc**

Autism is a neurotype not a disease. It is not something that can or should be 'cured'. Having said that, there are a lot of cooccurring conditions that can be helped with the use of the right tools and in some cases that might be the use of diet and vitamins. That does not mean the person's autism is being cured. It means that the autistic person is perhaps in less pain or less overstimulated because they are being provided the right things to treat other conditions or experiences they are having that contribute to them becoming overloaded. At the end of the day, that person is still autistic.

## **Autism is contagious**

Autism is not a disease. It is a neurotype and it is lifelong. In the same way that an autistic person cannot catch a neurotypical neurotype, you cannot catch autism. Though, this mindset paints an awfully negative view of autism anyway. So, while, no, you don't have to 'worry' about catching autism, Autism is not a bad thing! There is nothing wrong with us, we are just different and our needs are not well understood by the general population.

## **Autistic kids just need better boundaries**

It is very important to look after children's autistic needs. Their brains process information very differently to neurotypical people and what might seem very silly to you, could actually be very significant to them. If they have sensory sensitivities, they could very well be in pain from loud noises or certain textures, for example. Forcing the behaviours that you'd expect of a neurotypical child could be harmful to an autistic child.

## **People with executive function issues are just lazy and need to try harder**

Having executive functioning challenges isn't a matter of being lazy. Executive dysfunction creates challenges with planning, prioritising, organising, starting, and finishing tasks. It's like all steps or tasks have equal priority and they get mixed up and out of order or sometimes even lost entirely in a mess of overwhelming thoughts. Imagine it as though everyone else has a filing cabinet and each step or task goes on a piece of paper and it goes in its place and can be pulled out individually when it's needed, perhaps even put away when it's not needed. For someone with executive functioning challenges, they have all the papers, but they don't have the filing cabinet. So it's hard to keep things in order, it's easy for the stack to become large and overwhelming, and it can be hard to know where to start or even get themselves to start at all.

## **Picky eating is the parent's fault for "giving in"/ If they're hungry enough they'll eat**

An autistic person may have differences in their sensory experiences that make foods intolerable. Picky eating isn't naughty or anyone's "fault" and there isn't always an easy fix. Often just the thought of food can be overwhelming or disgusting. On top of this, a lot of autistic people have difficulties with interoception, meaning they actually can't tell when they are hungry. So, if they find foods difficult to eat, and don't feel the sensation of hunger, they aren't going to get to a point where they will eat whatever they are given.

Besides, imagine it as if you've been given a plate of worms and told that's what you'll eat when you're hungry enough. How hungry would you need to be to eat that plate of worms? Would you manage to get enough calories or nutrients if that is what was expected of you every day?

There does come a point where food aversion is a serious issue and needs medical intervention, and sometimes you need to work towards adding foods into a diet even if it's hard. However, it's also okay to allow yourself or your child to eat what they are comfortable eating if that is what they can manage.

This resource was written by an autistic author (2024)