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Women with Autism
Spectrum Disorder

AUTISM

8 Health Conditions Commonly Linked to Autism

Autism doesn't always travel alone.

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| Reviewed by Devon Frye



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THE BASICS[What Is Autism?](#)[Find a therapist to help with autism](#)**KEY POINTS**

- People with autism may experience a range of physical health conditions in addition to autism.
- Autism is commonly associated with skin conditions, asthma, food allergies, autoimmune diseases, and other health issues.
- Experts don't yet know exactly what causes these links, but research tends to point towards nervous system abnormalities.

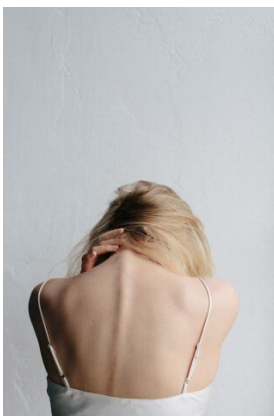
Although most people most commonly think of autism as a neurological

and developmental condition, it is also linked to a range of physical health conditions. The reasons why autism is associated with other health conditions are still not fully understood, although research suggests that it may be linked to an underlying central nervous system abnormality.¹

Some of the health conditions commonly associated with autism include:

1. Seizure disorders

The link between autism and epilepsy has been evident since autism was first identified as a condition.² Estimates of the percentage of individuals with autism who also have epilepsy range from 5 percent to 46 percent.³ The onset of epilepsy associated with autism is most common in childhood and adolescence.



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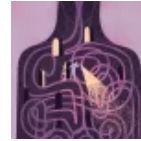
2. Gastrointestinal disorders

Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders, which can include chronic diarrhea and constipation, are far more common in children with autism. Some of the symptoms that children with both autism and GI problems may display include coughing excessively, refusing to swallow, hitting their jaw, eating to

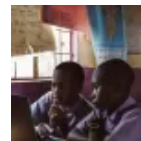
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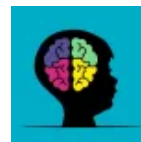
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relieve symptoms, and chewing excessively.

The link between GI issues and autism isn't fully understood, but food allergies may play a role in some people. There may also be a connection between immunity issues in people with autism and GI disorders. Research has also pointed to differences in gut microbiome in children with autism.⁴

3. Headaches and migraines

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One study revealed a significant link between autism and migraines in children.⁵ While the reasons for the increased risk of migraines among autistic children are not fully understood, some evidence suggests that it may be associated with sensory hyperactivity and higher levels of anxiety.

4. Eczema and skin conditions

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Children with autism are more likely to have psoriasis, eczema, and allergies than neurotypical children.⁶ Estimates of the prevalence of eczema among children with autism range from 7 percent to 64.2 percent.⁷ Interestingly, women with eczema or psoriasis appear to be more likely to have children with autism.⁸

5. Autoimmune disease

Autoimmune diseases are characterised by the immune system attacking the body's tissue. In 2009, a study by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health and the Aarhus University Research Foundation in Denmark discovered a possible link between autism and certain autoimmune diseases—including type 1 diabetes mellitus, celiac disease, and rheumatoid arthritis.⁹

6. Asthma

Children with autism and other developmental disorders are more than twice as likely to have asthma than the general population, according to one study.¹⁰ Other research, however, has found less conclusive links between autism and asthma.

7. Food allergies

When the body comes into contact with food proteins that it perceives as

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“enemies,” food allergies are the result. Although there’s nothing wrong with these food proteins, an allergic person’s immune system will release chemicals in an attempt to fight them off. One large-scale study showed that children with food allergies are more than twice as likely to have autism spectrum disorder than children without allergies.¹¹

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8. Ehlers-Danlos Syndromes (EDS)

EDS are connective tissue disorders that are caused by heritable impairments in the growth and repair of the body’s connective tissues, including ligaments, tendons, skin, bone, blood, and fatty tissue. Because connective tissue acts like the glue that holds the body together, EDS can cause issues with mobility and can severely affect the quality of life. There is a higher prevalence of autism in people with EDS than in the general population.¹²

Much of the research into autism and associated health conditions has concentrated on children. Anecdotally, many of the adult women with autism whom I work with experience health conditions including rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, migraines, EDS, and eczema. Ongoing research will, hopefully, clarify the links between autism and health conditions and point us in the right direction of how to manage autism and its comorbidities.

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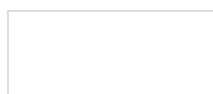
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