



THE AUTISM SPECTRUM AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



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EXERCISE AND WELLBEING

Regular exercise is beneficial for everyone, but many autistic people face sensory and social barriers that make it harder to take part.

([1], [2], [3])

Because of this, a larger number of autistic individuals experience health problems linked to a lack of physical activity.

A study that looked at many research findings found that regular exercise, like jogging, swimming, and weight training, can **greatly support** autism-specific behavioural, social, and motor characteristics. This can help reduce sensory distress.

([3])



HOW TO EXERCISE MORE

MAKE IT A GAME

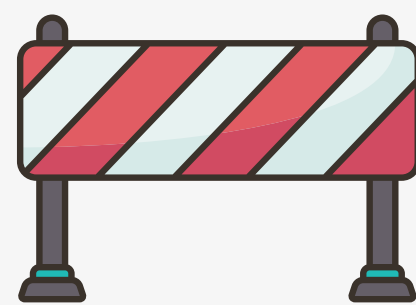
Make **physical activity** into a **game** to make the process more engaging and fun. Try creating a list of things to find while walking, jogging, or biking around your neighborhood or a park.



MAKE IT INTERESTING

Find ways to **integrate physical activity** with your **personal interests**. If you like reading, try listening to audiobooks while exercising

TIPS FOR GYM OPERATORS



REMOVE BARRIERS

Removing sensory barriers, like bright lights, loud noises, or overstimulating scents, can make facilities more **inviting** to people on the spectrum

PROVIDE SUPPORTS

Creating clear schedules and visual cues (e.g. posters explaining gym etiquette) can **reduce discomfort** and **ambiguity** and build a sense of **routine**.



EMBRACE NEURODIVERSITY

Normalize Autistic ways of being and give Autistic people the **same respect** afforded to any patron of the gym. Hire coaches/trainers who value and embrace neurodiversity

TOM STOLTMAN THE WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN

Two-time World's Strongest Man champion Tom Stoltman was diagnosed as autistic at the age of five. Despite facing childhood bullying and societal misconceptions about autism, Stoltman has risen to the top of his sport. He has openly shared his experiences, describing being autistic as a source of strength in his life. His success challenges stereotypes and showcases the diverse abilities of autistic individuals, highlighting that people on the spectrum are just as strong—both physically and mentally—as anyone else. To learn more about Stoltman's experience, check out this article from [The Guardian](#)

[1] OBRUSNIKOVA, I., & MICCINELLO, D. L. (2012). PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING AFTER-SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS. ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY QUARTERLY, 29(1), 63-80.

[2] REYNOLDS, S., BENDIXEN, R. M., LAWRENCE, T., & LANE, S. J. (2011). A PILOT STUDY EXAMINING ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION, SENSORY RESPONSIVENESS, AND COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN WITH HIGH FUNCTIONING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER. JOURNAL OF AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS, 41, 1496-1506.

[3] SRINIVASAN, S. M., PESCATELLO, L. S., & BHAT, A. N. (2014). CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EXERCISE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS. PHYSICAL THERAPY, 94(6), 875-889. [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.2522/PTJ.20130157](https://doi.org/10.2522/PTJ.20130157)