

AUTISM AND DEPRESSION

HOW DEPRESSION CAN PRESENT DIFFERENTLY IN NEURODIVERSE INDIVIDUALS

Studies indicate that people who present autistic traits, whether they are neurodiverse or not, show more symptoms of depression. The correlation is still being studied, but it is suggested that depression and autism are related and may be the result of living with autism. Depression often presents itself differently in neurodiverse individuals, which makes it much more difficult to pinpoint as an autistic, and to diagnose as a clinician.

- **Feelings of sadness or hopelessness – Repetitive thinking about negative events and emotions. Severely criticizing oneself.**
- **Physical symptoms – Constantly feeling fatigued. Unexplained body aches and pains (i.e., headaches, joint pain, stomach issues, tense muscles, etc.).**
- **Obsessive behaviors – Increased repetitive behaviors.**
- **Difficulty concentrating – Unable to focus. Difficulty with decision-making.**
- **Social withdrawal – Disengaging from everyday activities and withdrawing from family and friends.**
- **Shifting focus – Giving up on a much-loved focus or shifting to an entirely new focus or activity.**
- **Oppositional and aggressive behavior – Feeling irritable. Experiencing more feelings of an impending meltdown.**
- **Trouble concentrating – Feeling unable to focus.**
- **Sleep disturbances – Shifts in sleep pattern. Sleeping too much or too little. Insomnia.**
- **Changes in eating patterns – Eating too much or too little. Major loss or gain in weight.**
- **Self-injury – Ruminations of self-injury and suicidal thoughts.**

In a recent study, 72% of “high functioning” adults with autism scored higher than the clinical cutoff score for suicidality. Over 80% of high-functioning adults with autism report some type of psychiatric condition compared to about 20% of the control individuals.