

How to support autistic people

A guide for GP practice staff

Patient Online and The National Autistic Society



www.autism.org.uk

Organisation

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is the leading UK charity for people who have autism and Asperger syndrome, and their families.

They provide information, support and services, and campaign for a better world for autistic people.

They have about 20,000 members and 100 branches, which are very important to what they do.

Information about autistic people

Autism is a disability that people have for life. It is not an illness or disease and cannot be 'cured'. More than 1 in every 100 people has autism. We think around 700,000 people in the UK are autistic. Autism affects each person in different ways.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently to other people.

Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may need specialist support for the whole of their life.

Other people find bright lights or loud sounds, some tastes, smells and colours difficult to cope with.

People with autism might be affected by other conditions, like learning difficulties or disabilities, mental health issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), hearing loss, sight loss, or epilepsy.

There are 358,000 people in the UK who have both sight and hearing loss. Many of these people are living with learning disabilities or autism.

It is important to make sure you find out and use the right way of sharing information with each person.

What people with autism need

As people are affected by autism in different ways, they will have different needs. It is important to share information in different ways and always be clear, to the point and use simple language.

Autistic people may need more time to take in and understand information. Remember this especially if:

- there is a time limit to read something on a website
- the information is complicated
- there is a lot to read.

Some people may need support to use technology or have information explained to them.

How practices can help autistic people

Information needs to be:

- clear
- to the point
- easy to understand.

The following actions can make it easier for everyone to read information:

- Use plain English. This ensures that information is clear, to the point and does not contain words which could be misunderstood
- Break down large bits of information and keep sentences short
- Some people find reading hard. Use symbols, pictures or Easy Read instead. Easy Read uses pictures to explain text which helps people to understand
- Some autistic people find reading black text on a white background difficult. Print on yellow or blue paper instead of white
- Use accessible materials like different coloured paper or bigger text.

Plain English Campaign
Fighting for crystal-clear communication since 1979

**Yellow or Blue
Background**

- Social stories describe a situation, event or activity. They share specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. The NAS explain more about Social Stories and how to create them at <http://cms.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>
- The Brain in Hand app is designed to give people access to the best support when they need it. It gives them increased confidence to do more things independently, like starting a job, going to university, or doing some training. This is accompanied by professional facilitator support provided by The National Autistic Society*.
- Some people with autism take longer to understand information. They might need help from a member of staff when they start using GP online services.
- When talking to an autistic person, ask them what works best for them.



Support for practice staff

Staff need to know about the Accessible Information Standard

www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/accessibleinfo which gives advice on how to make information more understandable for everyone. All written information needs to be very clear and in plain English.

All healthcare staff should have training in how to support and communicate well with people living with autism.

*Please be aware that the Brain in Hand app is not affiliated to NHS England or National Autistic Society, nor is it produced by either organisation. We recommend that people considering the use of the Brain in Hand app carefully read and understand the terms and conditions of use for the app before they download it. Finally, at the current time NHS England doesn't know of any other app alternatives to the Brain in Hand app.