

SPECIAL REPORTS

Special Report: Autistic strengths and special interests

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Social difficulties. Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior. Sensory sensitivity. Autism has long been defined by its challenges. But autism sometimes comes with advantages. This special report highlights those advantages and describes the research behind them.

In one Deep Dive, we explore **potential benefits** to the way some autistic people see and hear the world, their sense of morality and their ability to process information in unusual ways. A second Deep Dive underscores the positive aspects of **special interests**, an unusually intense fascination with a specific topic. Evidence suggests that these interests can help build confidence and enhance well-being, facilitate learning and sometimes even launch a career.

For decades, the mainstream scientific community overlooked or even dismissed the idea that strengths can accompany autism. The latest evidence shows, however, that this oversight distorts understanding of the condition. It also may lead doctors, teachers and others to try to suppress certain traits in autistic people. This report is an attempt to fill important gaps in the scientific and clinical portrait of autism.