

NEWS

Repetitive behaviors wax and wane among autistic youth

BY PETER HESS

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Some types of restricted and repetitive behaviors **become more prevalent** among autistic children and teenagers over time, depending on their **age and intellectual ability**, whereas others decrease, two new studies show.

The results lend fresh support to the argument that **restricted and repetitive behaviors** — a core diagnostic trait that includes repetitive movements, insistence on sameness, sensory sensitivities and restricted interests — are too diverse to be **lumped together**.

“This is a complex behavioral domain that comprises several different subdomains that likely have different causes and might respond to different treatments,” says **Mirko Uljarević**, senior research fellow at the University of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia, who led one of the studies.

Tracking how these behaviors change over time can help clinicians develop better strategies to support autistic children and teenagers, says **Benjamin Yerys**, assistant professor of psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, who was not involved in either study. A child who needs support for one type of behavior at age 3, for example, may no longer need support for it — or may need a different type of support — at age 13, he says.

“Maybe it’s not necessary to put resources and effort on diminishing those that will diminish anyway,” says Valérie Courchesne, a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Canada, who led the second study.

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