

**SPOTTED**

# Picking priorities; wristband recorder; going for gold

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## Picking priorities

The British autism charity Autistica last week released a list of **the top 10 priorities for autism research**.

The list is based on input from more than 1,200 people, including adults with autism, their families and clinicians. Autistica asked these individuals to identify the research questions that were most important to them.

Topping the list is “Which interventions improve mental health or reduce mental health problems in people with autism?” Other questions address the challenges of **diagnosing autism in adults** and **understanding sensory sensitivities**.

“The creation of an independent, community-backed and ranked set of research questions represents a significant achievement (particularly considering the diverse range of strong views on autism research),” **a statement** on Autistica’s website reads.

The charity plans to work with research funding organizations to begin answering some of these questions.

### SOURCES:

**Autistica** / 17 Aug 2016

“Your questions: shaping future autism research”

<https://www.autistica.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Autism-Top-10-Your-Priorities-for-Autism-Research.pdf>

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## ADHD epidemic

A new book probes the ballooning rate of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). About 11 percent of children have a diagnosis of ADHD, according to the latest estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — up from 7.8 percent in 2003.

In the book, titled “**ADHD Nation**: Children, Doctors, Big Pharma, and the Making of an American Epidemic,” author **Alan Schwarz** calls ADHD “the most misdiagnosed condition in American medicine.”

Schwarz argues that marketing and awareness campaigns — fueled by pharmaceutical companies, psychopharmacologists and policymakers — are driving up diagnoses. As a result, doctors are prescribing powerful and potentially dangerous medications to children who don’t need them.

In a review for *The New York Times*, **Steve Silberman** calls the book “important, humane and compellingly written.”

“Schwarz makes a convincing case that the radical expansion and promotion of ADHD has resulted in the label being applied in ways that are far beyond the needs of a historically underserved community,” Silberman writes.

Children with autism are even more likely than those without the condition to be diagnosed with ADHD. By some estimates, **nearly half of children with autism** also meet the criteria for ADHD.

### SOURCES:

**The New York Times** / 22 Aug 2016

Overselling ADHD: A new book exposes big pharma’s role

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/books/review/adhd-nation-alan-schwarz.html>

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## Wristband recorder

Researchers have developed a **digital wristband** to help people with autism track their anxiety.

The soft, stretchy band, called Snap, includes a 3D-printed ‘pod’ that contains a wireless microcontroller. When the wearer feels anxious, he or she can pull on the wristband, which digitally records the time. Users can then download the data to understand anxiety patterns, timing and triggers.

“This is about empowering people with data to reflect about their anxiety,” Snap co-developer **Will**

**Simm**, senior research associate at Lancaster University in the U.K., **said in a media statement**.

Snap could also be configured to alert a caregiver when its wearer is feeling anxious, the researchers say.

**SOURCES:**

**Fierce Biotech** / 18 Aug 2016

Wearable digitally records anxiety data for adults with autism

<http://www.fiercebiotech.com/medical-devices/wearable-digitally-records-anxiety-data-for-adults-autism>

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## Career creator

A small software testing company based in southern California is helping adults with autism launch their careers: Most of the company's 35 employees are on the spectrum, **according to CNBC**.

"The talent needed to be a good software tester is strong pattern recognition, strong attention to detail and the ability to have strong focus," Chad Hahn, founder of Santa Monica-based **Mindspark**, told CNBC. "Those are three traits we look for and traits that members of the autistic community have in numbers."

**Many adults with autism are unemployed** or underemployed. But MindSpark is among a growing group of companies recognizing the **advantages of employees with autism**.

The company's recruits, many of whom have never previously had an office job, complete an eight-week training program and spend three months as paid apprentices before becoming full-time employees. Pay ranges from \$16 to \$30 an hour.

**SOURCES:**

**CNBC** / 23 Aug 2016

One tech start-up's quest to build careers for people with autism

<http://www.cnbc.com/2016/08/23/one-tech-start-ups-quest-to-build-careers-for-people-with-autism.html>

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## Going for gold

Michael Brannigan, an elite runner with autism, will make his **Paralympic debut** in Rio next month.

The 19-year-old New Yorker was diagnosed with autism **when he was 18 months old** and didn't speak until age 5. When Brannigan was 7 years old, his father took him to a local running club, where he quickly showed promise. He became a top-ranked high-school runner, breaking state records in New York.

Brannigan can run a mile in 3 minutes and 57 seconds. He won two medals at last year's Paralympic Athletics World Championships, including a gold in the 1500-meter event.

"I keep reaching for the stars and have support from my friends and family, everywhere and every day in my life," Brannigan **told Team USA** in April.

Brannigan's parents say running has "**changed his life**," calming him, giving him confidence, and accelerating his academic, mental and social progress.

**SOURCES:**

**NBC News** / 20 Aug 2016

World class teen runner with autism prepares for Paralympic debut

<http://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/world-class-teen-runner-with-autism-prepares-for-paralympic-debut-747952195555>**Team USA** / 01 Apr 2016

How running changed Mikey Brannigan's life with autism

<http://www.teamusa.org/News/2016/April/01/How-Running-Changed-Mikey-Brannigans-Life-With-Autism>

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## Job news

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