

OPINION

# Is social disinterest a symptom of Rett syndrome?

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Last week we reported on a **long-term study** suggesting that the typically poor health of individuals with Rett syndrome improves as they get older.

[Read the full article here »](#)

The **official description of Rett syndrome**, at the U.S. National Library of Medicine, includes “low social interest” as a defining symptom. However, a number of parents who responded to our article said that their children with Rett syndrome do not suffer from social deficits — and in some cases are highly social.

These parent observations are not entirely surprising. Reports show that a number of people with the disorder **have intense gaze**, which they use to communicate with others. Mouse models of the disorder also support good social skills: Detailed studies show that Rett syndrome mice are actually **more social than controls**.

These contrasting pictures of Rett syndrome may reflect how difficult it is to detect or define social deficits in people with other severe symptoms, such as intellectual disability and lack of motor skills.

What do you think?

- Researcher **Jeffrey Neul** notes that the intense gaze in individuals with Rett syndrome is an interesting example of how social interest can manifest in people with intellectual disability, impaired language and severe motor deficits. How should

**we define and measure sociability in these groups?**

- **What might explain a subset of individuals diagnosed with Rett syndrome who don't have social deficits?**

Share your thoughts in the comments section below. Or, to dig deeper, continue the conversation in the moderated **SFARI Forum** for researchers. Not yet a member? Learn how to register [here](#).