

Autistic Characteristics Inventory

This exploratory questionnaire describes autistic characteristics in adults and what they cost day to day: communication, social rules, sensory experience, need for predictability, intense interests, camouflaging, overload, and exhaustion. It helps prepare the interview when an evaluation for autism spectrum disorder is being considered, and identify situations that call for accommodations in someone who has already been diagnosed.

Number of questions	28 questions
Estimated duration	7 minutes
Language	English
Original name	Autistic Characteristics Inventory
Target audience	Adults
Category	Autism spectrum

Preview of the 28 questions

In your everyday life, how often is this true for you?

I realize afterward that something someone said meant something other than what I thought (sarcasm, a hint, veiled criticism).

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often

In your everyday life, how often is this true for you?

I have trouble figuring out a group's unspoken rules (at work, in my family, among friends).

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often

In your everyday life, how often is this true for you?

The noise in a busy place (a restaurant, a store, a shared office) makes me leave or go off by myself.

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often

In your everyday life, how often is this true for you?

An unexpected change of plans (a rescheduled appointment, a different route) really throws me off.

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often

In your everyday life, how often is this true for you?

When I get absorbed in a topic I love, I forget to eat, sleep, or take a break.

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often

Administer your questionnaires online

Send your patient a link: they answer from their phone or computer, and you receive the scored results by email.

View the questionnaire on mentaal.org ›

Scoring & interpretation

Scoring

Each statement is scored from 0 (never) to 4 (very often) based on its frequency in everyday life. Each domain combines 4 statements spread throughout the questionnaire, giving a score from 0 to 16.

Reading the profile

There is no total score. Domains are ranked from most to least elevated, each with a description of what it covers and points to explore in the interview. The domains are read in two steps: the characteristics themselves (communication, social rules, sensory experience, routines, interests), then what they cost the person (camouflaging, overload and exhaustion). Marked camouflaging and overload point toward everyday accommodations and recovery time, whatever the diagnosis.

Clinical cautions

Social anxiety, a history of trauma, an attention disorder, or depression can produce a similar profile; a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder relies on a specialized evaluation that traces development since childhood. The questionnaire does not explore suicidal thoughts, which can accompany autistic burnout. They should be assessed in the interview, especially when the "Overload and exhaustion" domain is elevated.

Limitations

This exploratory questionnaire has not undergone psychometric validation and has no cutoffs. It supports the clinical interview and does not provide a diagnosis.

Scoring example

Scoring

Communication and conversation 11 / 16

Understanding implied meaning and irony, the effort required by conversations with no clear purpose or with several people, misunderstandings.

Areas to explore: the most draining communication situations (phone calls, meetings, informal conversation), recent misunderstandings, what helps (writing, explicit requests).

See also: SRS-2, RAADS-R.

Overload and exhaustion 10 / 16

Need to recover after social interaction, moments of overload (freezing, loss of control), and exhaustion that spreads to everyday tasks, as in autistic burnout.

Areas to explore: the signs that overload is coming, episodes of freezing or meltdown and their triggers, a period of prolonged exhaustion and what caused it, ways of recovering.

Intense interests 8 / 16

Intense, absorbing interests that are sources of pleasure and expertise and can take priority over bodily needs and obligations.

Areas to explore: current and past interests, what they bring (pleasure, calm, competence), the place they take in the day and in relationships.

Camouflaging 6 / 16

Efforts to hide or compensate for one's characteristics in front of others: soothing movements held back, forced eye contact, interests kept quiet, put-on reactions.

Areas to explore: the situations in which the person hides the most (work, family, meeting new people), the energy it costs them, the places and people with whom they can be themselves.

See also: CAT-Q.

Social rules and relationships 5 / 16

Unspoken group rules, uncertainty about the nature of relationships, difficulty keeping up friendships, vulnerability to people who take advantage of one's trust.

Areas to explore: current relationships (friendships, partner, work), experiences of rejection, teasing, or manipulation, what the person wants from relationships.

See also: SRS-2.

Sensory experience 5 / 16

Sensitivity to noise, light, smells, and textures, and delayed awareness of body signals (hunger, thirst, cold).

Areas to explore: the senses involved, the places avoided, accommodations already in place (headphones, tinted glasses, chosen clothing), the perception of pain and fatigue.

See also: GSQ.

Routines and predictability 4 / 16

Need for predictability, reassuring habits, the cost of unexpected changes and of transitions from one activity to another.

Areas to explore: the habits that reassure, the most unsettling unexpected changes, what helps (a schedule, advance notice), how much anxiety is involved.

No validated clinical or psychometric cutoffs have been established for this test yet. The results should therefore be considered exploratory indicators, meant to support the clinical interview, not diagnostic findings.

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 Emily T. - Online CBT Psychologist