

Aging in Autism: Supporting an Autistic Older Adult

A toolkit with suggestions how to support autistic seniors



We all age, yet not everyone's care needs in the later years are the same. This is especially true with autistic older adults. There is little information on aging and autism, and this is an emerging issue we need to get ahead of. What we do know is that autism is lifelong, neurodevelopmental, and viewed as a spectrum. The needs of autistic individuals are different for everyone..

Autism Society Alberta's team of support workers, Autistic peers, parents, professionals and community agency partners who support seniors, have created some resources and information to help navigate this complex world.

A Video about Autism and Seniors

This is a 53 minute video done by the Autism Society of Calgary that talks about the unique needs that come with aging and autism.

[Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\) and Seniors Workshop](#)

Visual Stimuli – Lighting

Avoid lighting that produces a sound such as fluorescent lights.

If possible install dimmable lighting or purchase light filters

Be aware of Glare! Both natural and artificial lighting can produce a glare on objects in the home such as appliances, hardwood floors, screens and picture frames. Window tinting or sheer curtains can help with this.

The use of natural colours in paint and art work can be beneficial. Creating a monochromatic colour scheme would be a suggestion.

Keep the living space decluttered and use easily accessible storage areas that are organized by content. This can assist with maintaining routines.

Offer hats or sunglasses to help with reducing the visual stimuli when needed.



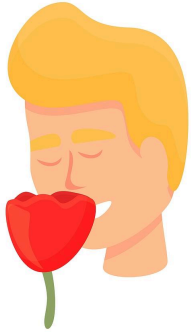
Auditory Stimuli – Sound

Opt for carpet if possible, or have area rugs and runners in high traffic areas. Be aware however of tripping risks.

Be aware of noise pollution in the home, TVs, radios, furnace, appliances running, outside noise and activity. Ensure the senior has a comfortable space where as much of the noise can be filtered.

Have earplugs, noise canceling headphones, white noises machines or music players available (these tools are dependant on the individuals preference)

If in a care facility or shared living environment adapting the timing of when someone attends to needs in a communal setting to less busy times.



Smell

Choose low odor materials when possible (paints, adhesives, flooring)

Proper ventilation and filtration. Use certified filters for your HVAC system.

Choose low noise air purification systems.

Avoid the use of scented candles and air fresheners. Choose scentless cleaning products.

Sensory Activities and Tools

Scent boxes – Make a collection of scents an individual may find calming or enjoy. Using small plastic containers or sealable bags, fill each with different scented items. (cinnamon, spices, wood chips) Alternatively you can use essential oils dabbed on small cotton pads or in an infuser.

Weighted Blankets or weighted pillows – Ensure you consult with a professional such as an Occupational Therapist prior to using weighted tools.

Compression clothing – These garments provide a deep pressure input that can help regulate an individual. Body socks or compression bedding are also items that provide similar sensory stimulation or regulation. Ensure you consult with a professional such as an Occupational Therapist as well keeping in mind the mobility of the individual.

Fidget tools – Fidgets are an ageless tool! Provide some options for individuals and based on ones they like, create a tool box for them to access whenever they need.

Movement – Based on an individual's needs, movement spaces are needed. Rocking chairs, swings, swivel chairs or large comfortable seats will help provide comfort. Room to move freely as pacing, spinning or even jumping may be activities the individual will need to be able to do when they need. Keep in mind tripping hazards in these areas like uneven flooring or a change in flooring (vinyl to carpet)

Comfort Activities for Seniors - This website has a long list of ideas and activities intended to decrease stress and provide comfort.

- [Comfort Activities for Decreasing Stress in Elders \(caregiversactivitysource.com\)](https://caregiversactivitysource.com)

Understanding Sensory Processing Differences - This guide will outline the eight sensory systems and help caregivers to better understand the sensory needs of others.

- [Sensory Processing Differences Toolkit \(aidecanada.ca\)](https://aidecanada.ca)

At Home Activities

Seniors' Centre Without Walls – This free phone-based program offers a variety of interactive programs. Accessible to anyone in Alberta 55+ CALL 780-395-2626 to register.

- [Seniors' Centre Without Walls - Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network | Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network \(edmontonsouthsidepcn.ca\)](https://edmontonsouthsidepcn.ca)

Virtual Travel – This site provides links to webcams and virtual tours from all over the world. From museums to theme parks, explore from the comfort of your home.

- [Here's a List of All the Virtual Tours You Can Take Right Now—for Free! \(tasteofhome.com\)](https://tasteofhome.com)

Games - Play sudoku, trivia, crosswords, code cracker or wordsearch. Games updated every day! Or play chess.

- <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/games>
- <https://www.chess.com/>

Seniors Resources in Alberta

Many organizations are providing online and virtual programs and supports dedicated to supporting seniors.

Caregivers Alberta – Supports and services for caregivers in Alberta.

- [Support For Caregivers - Caregivers Alberta](https://caregiversalberta.ca)

Core Alberta – The knowledge hub for Community-Based Seniors Serving organizations and allied agencies and individuals in Alberta.

- [Healthy Aging CORE Alberta](https://corealberta.ca)

Programs & Services for Seniors – Information on services such as financial assistance provided through the Government of Canada.

- [Programs and services for seniors - Canada.ca](https://seniors.gc.ca)

Seniors – Financial assistance and other supports for seniors, caregivers and service providers. Available throughout Alberta.

- [Seniors | Alberta.ca](https://www.alberta.ca/seniors)

Stop Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health or well-being of a senior.

- To report abuse CALL 310-1818
- IN CASE OF EMERGENCY AND IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL 911
- Local Contact Numbers for Reporting Abuse
 - Calgary Area: 403-705-3250
 - Edmonton Area: 780-454-8888
 - Red Deer Area: 403-346-6076
 - Strathcona County: 780-464-7233
 - Grande Prairie: 780-539-6255
 - Medicine Hat: 403-952-8984
 - Lethbridge Area: 403-394-0306
 - St. Albert: 780-460-2195
 - Wood Buffalo/Fort McMurray: 780-743-4370
- <https://www.alberta.ca/get-help-elder-abuse.aspx>
- <https://www.albertaelderabuse.ca/>



Emerging Information

Included here is some emerging work and research on the topic of autism and aging.

Aging & Autism: A think tank round table

- http://newsite.autismalberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Aging_-_Autism_-_A_Think_Tank_Round_Table.pdf

Autism Aging: the Odyssey

- <http://newsite.autismalberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-Odyssey-of-Autism-Aging.pdf>

Designing Spaces for People with Invisible Disabilities

- http://newsite.autismalberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/U_of_A-Designing_Spaces_to_Age_Well-Dec04_2020.pdf

Strategies for Research Practice and Policies

- http://newsite.autismalberta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Strategies_For_Research_Practices_and_Policies.pdf

**The Autism Society Alberta does not support, endorse or recommend any method, treatment, product, remedial center, program, service or professional for individuals with autism or disabilities. It will, however, endeavor to provide impartial information.*