

Autism Spectrum

Autism Spectrum, including Asperger syndrome

Every person on the autism spectrum has different strengths and challenges. Strengths that some students on the autism spectrum have described are: good memory skills, focus, precision, dedication, persistence, good observation and analytical skills.

Some of the challenges that students have reported are noted below. You may find that you have some of these difficulties.

Beginning study

Depending on your own profile of strengths and challenges, some aspects of study may be more difficult for you. It is important to consider giving staff some information about your individual learning needs so they are in the best position to work with you on achieving your goals.

Some of the difficulties students have reported include:

- 'Overstudying' some parts of course content because of intense interest in these aspects, while ignoring other important content.
- Focusing too long on minor details because it is hard to work out what is important to meet study goals.
- Feeling overloaded with unimportant stimuli without being able to screen them out.
- Having difficulty making links between what has already been learned and new information.
- Not being clear about what to study for exams, so trying to review the whole course.
- Difficulties in understanding exactly what other people mean and finding it hard to know what the tutor expects in assessments. Being told that their assessment responses give too much or too little information or are off topic.
- Finding that routines produce a sense of safety and comfort, while changes in routine or new situations can create a sense of unpredictability and lead to feelings of uncertainty, stress and anxiety.
- Finding that social situations, such as group work, are unpredictable and hard to interpret and require significant concentration and energy and sometimes avoiding these situations because of the stress.
- Experiencing sensory sensitivities (to noise, flickering lights, movement and other sensations) so that environments like lecture theatres feel so overwhelming that it becomes impossible to think clearly.
- Feeling fatigue and stress as a result of coping with a large amount of overwhelming environmental stimulation and confusing social information.
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday routines and expectations when under stress.

Suggestions for successful learning and study

Disability Services

Disability Services staff will work with you to find strategies and supports to help you have a positive study experience. Staff will be respectful and supportive as they talk with you and find approaches that will help you to be a successful student. Staff respect your privacy and will discuss with you what information about your needs can be shared with the teaching staff in your courses.

Before your studies start

- Get advice about the study load expected for particular courses and to help you make a decision about a reasonable study load.
- Before classes start, we can show you your classrooms; you may want to find a place to sit that will feel comfortable for you. For instance: you may choose a seat at the end of a row so you can leave easily. Go to class early so you can claim your preferred seat.
- If you have a preferred time of day for better concentration, see if you can schedule classes to match your time preferences.
- If you find the physical or social environment drains your energy, schedule breaks between classes.
- If the demands of full time study do not work for you, but you want to have access to StudyLink loans and allowances, ask for information about the limited full-time study option.

Managing your study

- Work within your energy and avoid information overload. Take breaks; rest or exercise before, between or after classes; use relaxation exercises.
- Find out about strategies or supports for notetaking in class so you do not miss class content if you are having concentration lapses. Discuss your notetaking needs with Disability Services staff; for instance, you may be able to borrow a recording device to use in class.
- Work on planning, organisation and time management skills so you are well prepared for assessments and do not become overloaded.
- Work on strategies to make sure you have a good understanding about what the tutor is expecting from you in assessments. Disability Services and Learning Services staff can help you with this.
- Make an appointment at Learning Services to get help with skills such as learning and memory strategies, planning and writing your assignment, essay and report writing and notetaking skills.
- You may be eligible for specific exam arrangements such as a separate room or reader/writer support.
- Talk to your tutor or Disability Services staff if you are feeling confused or stressed by new information, changes in your study environment or by social expectations in your class.
- Talk to Disability Services about the room you can book for some time-out or quiet study time.
- Keep academic staff or Disability Services staff informed if you are absent from class or having difficulties. Ara staff are committed to supporting you to successfully complete your courses.

Phone: 940 8089 email: disability@ara.ac.nz

For more information:

Autism NZ: <http://www.autismnz.org.nz/>

Study resource: http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/aspergers_syndrome