

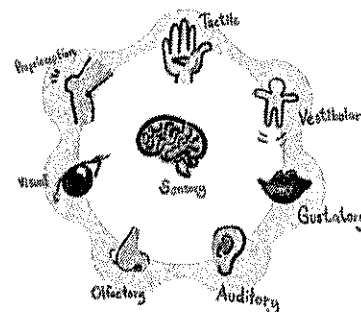
# Stimming

Many individuals, particularly those living with ASC find coping with sensory input and social communication difficult and stimming is a way to release stress and anxiety in these situations.

## What Is Stimming?

The term “stimming” is short for self-stimulatory behaviour, sometimes also referred to as “stereotypic” behaviour. It is the repetition of physical movements, sounds or repetitive movement of objects.

Examples of these can be hand-flapping, rocking, spinning or repeating words and phrases.



## Why Do People Stim?

Stimming is a way to regulate stress and emotions. These behaviours lead to sensory input but also release tension and energy, which relieves stress. This helps with sensory processing and aids in social communication (supports how we communicate and interact with others).

## Embracing stimming

People used to be discouraged from stimming and were encouraged to unlearn the behaviour, however, this does more harm than good (as long as the stim itself isn't causing any harm).

### Top tips for stimming safely

- Make sure you aren't causing harm to yourself - check whether how you stim damages any part of your body and use protective aids if it does.
- Carry a card that explains your behaviour, communicates your needs, and reassures those around you that you are safe.
- If you feel pressured to not stim in public, create a safe space to practice your stims at home and explain to friends and relatives why stimming is so important to your well-being.
- Stimming is a coping and communication skill; it can help you to learn more about what triggers your emotions or what causes you to feel overwhelmed.
- Finding community support can help you to learn more about these triggers, there are also pro-stimming sites on social media, which can help you to feel less alone.
- Never let others shame you into changing harmless behaviours.
- Don't feel ashamed if you mask your stimming in certain environments - the choice to modify or stop your behaviours should only ever be made by you!

*\*\*Adapted from the Autism Information Service Website*

## Masking

### What Is Masking Or Camouflaging?

- Masking is when an individual 'masks' or hides behaviours (such as stims – self-stimulating behaviours) which may be seen as socially unacceptable, or when an individual behaves in a certain way to fit in with those around them i.e., changing the way they act around peers in order not to be seen as 'different'.



Masking may manifest itself as:

- Becoming withdrawn and quiet in certain environments, so that any neurodiverse traits are less obvious.
- Suppressing self-stimulating behaviours, such as hand flapping or chewing.
- Some individuals may prepare topics of conversations and jokes.
- Mirroring the actions of others.

### What Effects Can Masking Have?

- May cause stress responses in an environment where an individual feels safe and comfortable. For example, an individual might be able to mask at school, but sensory behaviours or 'meltdowns' may be a lot more apparent at home.
- Can have a negative impact on mental health in the longer term.
- Can cause individuals to burn out (become tired), causing withdrawal (isolating from others or disengaging from activities once enjoyed).
- Reduce self-esteem and self-identity.

### What Can You Do To Reduce Masking?

- Regular movement activities or other feel-good strategies in all environments.
- Ask for / allow movement breaks or opportunities to engage in feel good strategies as these are essential to remain regulated.
- Identify and share discreet signals for when things are too much and when a break is required. You may wish to share these signals with family, close friends or teachers.
- Explore a range of sensory seeking strategies that can be used in a range of environments (Grounding strategies may help)

# Hot Chocolate Breathing

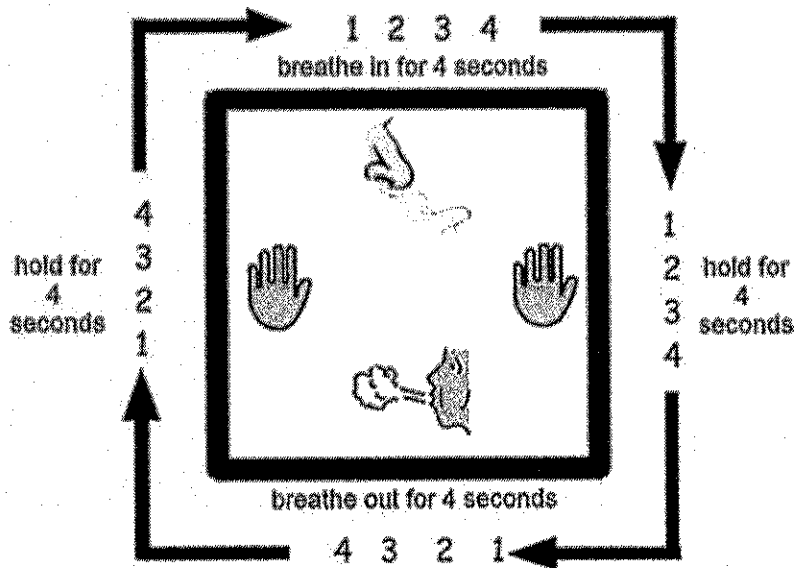


Pretend you are holding a warm mug of hot chocolate. Take in a slow, deep breath through your nose to smell the treat. Then breathe out through your mouth to cool it off. Repeat this five times. Deep breathing is a great tool to calm your mind and your body!



HealthySteps.com 2011

## SQUARE BREATHING




5 ★ 4 ★ 3 ★ 2 ★ 1

**SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN:**

FIRST OFF... TAKE 3 SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS!

5 LIST 5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE 

4 LIST 4 THINGS YOU CAN FEEL 

3 LIST 3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR 

2 LIST 2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL 

1 LIST SOMETHING POSITIVE ABOUT YOURSELF! *MAKE today COUNT*

FINISHED? TAKE 3 MORE SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

- Feet** Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
- Calves** Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
- Thighs** Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
- Torso** Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
- Back** Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
- Shoulders** Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
- Arms** Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
- Hands** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
- Face** Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
- Full Body** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

## **Additional Resources and Signposting**

### **Further Reading for facilitators**

#### **Research Papers:**

#### **Autistic Strengths**

Happé F, Vital P. What aspects of autism predispose to talent? *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* 2009 May 27;364(1522):1369-75. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2008.0332. PMID: 19528019; PMCID: PMC2677590. What aspects of autism predispose to talent? - PMC (nih.gov)

Devenish, B. D., Mantilla, A., Bowe, S. J., Grundy, E. A. C., & Rinehart, N. J. (2022). Can common strengths be identified in autistic young people? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 98, 102025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2022.102025>

Pennisi, P., Giallongo, L., Milintenda, G. *et al.* Autism, autistic traits and creativity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cogn Process* **22**, 1–36 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10339-020-00992-6>

#### **Masking:**

Chapman, L., Rose, K., Hull, L., & Mandy, W. (2022). "I want to fit in... but I don't want to change myself fundamentally": A qualitative exploration of the relationship between masking and mental health for autistic teenagers. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 99, 102069. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1750946722001568#bib40>

Camouflaging in autism a systematic review (Cook et al. 2022): Cook, J., Hull, L., Crane, L., & Mandy, W. (2021). Camouflaging in autism: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 89, 102080. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735821001239>

#### **Debunking myths on Autistic communication:**

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective. *Autism*, 24(7), 1704–1712. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286>

Crompton, C. J., Hallett, S., Ropar, D., Flynn, E., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). 'I never realised everybody felt as happy as I do when I am around autistic people': A thematic analysis of autistic adults' relationships with autistic and neurotypical friends and family. *Autism*, 24(6), 1438–1448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320908976>

#### **Autistic people's views on stimming:**

'People should be allowed to do what they like': Autistic adults' views and experiences of stimming

Kapp, S. K., Steward, R., Crane, L., Elliott, D., Elphick, C., Pellicano, E., & Russell, G. (2019). 'People should be allowed to do what they like': Autistic adults' views and experiences of stimming. *Autism*, 23(7), 1782–1792.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319829628>

### Books:

1. Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate by Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé.
  - [Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate: Amazon.co.uk: Fletcher-Watson, Sue, Happé, Francesca: 9781138106123: Books](#)
2. The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain (published in Hardcover as Neurodiversity). Da Capo Lifelong Books. By Thomas Armstrong.
  - [Link The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain \(published in hardcover as Neurodiversity\): Amazon.co.uk: Armstrong PhD, Ph.D. Thomas: 9780738215242: Books](#)
3. Neurodiversity! What's That?: An introduction to neurodiversity for kids by Nadine Ramina Arthur:
  - [Neurodiversity! What's That?: An introduction to neurodiversity for kids: Amazon.co.uk: Arthur, Nadine Ramina: 9781399918237: Books](#)
4. NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently by Steve Silberman
  - [NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently: Steve Silberman: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)
5. Inclusive Education for Autistic Children: Helping Children and Young People to Learn and Flourish in the Classroom
  - [Inclusive Education for Autistic Children: Helping Children and Young People to Learn and Flourish in the Classroom: Amazon.co.uk: Dr Rebecca Wood, Foreword by Dr Wenn B. Lawson: 9781785923210: Books](#)
6. Nurturing Your Autistic Young Person: A Parent's Handbook to Supporting Newly Diagnosed Teens and Pre-Teens
  - [Nurturing Your Autistic Young Person: A Parent's Handbook to Supporting Newly Diagnosed Teens and Pre-Teens: Amazon.co.uk: Wassell, Cathy: 9781839971112: Books](#)

### Weblinks:

- The national autistic society autism in women and girls: <https://autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>
- The ADHD Neurodiversity foundation: <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>