

# Guide to Stimming for Autistic Individuals

## What is stimming?

Stimming is a shorter way of saying self-regulatory behaviour. This means behaviour which allows you to regulate or manage your emotions, or actions. These behaviours are normally repetitive.

## Do only autistic people stim?

No! Neurotypical people sometimes stim, for example by twisting a ring or twisting their hands or fingers, when they are experiencing intense emotions. Stimming is also seen in other neurodivergent people such as ADHDers. However, autistic may need to stim more than non-autistic people as environments are often less inclusive for autistic people, meaning they are more likely to need to self-regulate or self-soothe.

## What are common stims?

It is difficult to say that there is a 'common' stim because there is so much variety. However, stimming may include:

- Flapping your arms
- Biting fingernails
- Tapping fingers
- Rocking back and forth
- Clapping
- Sucking thumb
- Repeating words or noises

## Why do people stim?

People stim for many reasons. Someone might stim if they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed however someone might also stim if they are excited or happy.

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## Should I try not to stim?

No! If you are stimming to self-regulate, you need to do this. There is nothing wrong with stimming, and people who think there is are incorrect. However if your stimming behaviours are causing danger to yourself or others, you might want to discuss with a trusted professional what alternative stims you can do.

Examples of dangerous stimming behaviours include:

- Placing dangerous items in mouth
- Headbutting a wall or other objects
- Scratching skin/pulling at scabs
- Biting

However, many autistic people feel as if they need to hide their stimming behaviours due to other people being unsupportive. If you decide to do this, you should not feel guilty or inauthentic for doing so, you are just doing what you need to do to protect yourself.

## What should I do if people are unsupportive of my stimming?

People who are unsupportive and judgemental of stimming are demonstrating discriminatory behaviour. Whilst it is important to remember that it is not your responsibility to educate people about autism, you could direct them to our fact sheets about stimming. If you are experiencing discrimination at work as a result of stimming, you could speak to ACAS ([If you've been discriminated against at work - Acas](#)) or the management or Human Relations team at work, if you feel comfortable doing so.

It is important to remember that stimming is entirely natural and nothing to be ashamed of, but sometimes society may make you feel ashamed or different for stimming. If possible, surround yourself with people who are neuro-affirming, so you have the psychological safety to be your authentic self and stim when you need to do so. Many neurodivergent individuals find supportive spaces online, or in spaces where there are lots of other neurodivergent individuals

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