

Rumination leads to problems in boys with autism

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Credit: Leiden University

Boys with autism are more prone to develop physical complaints, depression and aggressive behaviour. Psychologists at Leiden University have discovered that this is mainly related to rumination. Publication in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

Research has shown that autism not only leads to social [problems](#). Young people with [autism](#) also suffer anxiety, depression and stomach aches—often referred to as 'internalising complaints.' These young people also exhibit aggressive and contrary behaviour more often than their peers without autism. Leiden development psychologists Marieke Bos and Carolien Rieffe wanted to find out how that comes about: are these complaints inherent in the [autism spectrum disorder](#), or is there something else going on?

To find out, the researchers monitored a group of adolescents between 10 and 15 years old, over a period of eighteen months. They compared the development of all kinds of complaints in adolescents with and without autism. They also looked at their emotional functioning: how much time they spent ruminating, whether they had insight into their own emotions and whether they often had negative feelings. "This is the first study of its kind," Rieffe explained, "while it is fairly obvious that these factors can be the cause of

internalising and externalising complaints."

Rumination root of problems

This proved to be true: the research showed that rumination is a risk factor in developing these complaints. Young people with autism who spend more time thinking negatively about problems are more likely to develop [physical complaints](#) and exhibit [aggressive behaviour](#) at a later point in time. Rieffe: "This is an indication that thinking about everyday problems is more difficult for adolescents with autism. They have more difficulties finding a solution for problems, and instead talk or think themselves deeper into a black hole."

Surprisingly enough, problems like anxiety, depression and aggressive behaviour seem to follow a similar pattern in adolescent boys whether or not they suffer from autism. However, these problems are more prevalent among young people with autism, which indicates that this tendency must therefore already be determined before the start of adolescence. "This means that young people with autism are not suddenly at extra risk of developing these problems when they reach puberty," Rieffe explains. "And that is good news for their parents, doctors and the [young people](#) themselves."

Provided by Leiden University

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