



Autism Intervention Research  
Network on Physical Health

# AIR-P LEND Seminar Series

**Community-Based Lifestyle Interventions**



**PRIYANKA FERNANDES, MBBS, MPH**

**DIRECTOR, UCLA PREVENTIVE MEDICINE  
TRAINING PROGRAM**

**COMMUNITY-BASED LIFESTYLE  
INTERVENTION NODE LEADER, AIR-P**



**CANDACE GRAGNANI, MD, MPH**

**ASSOCIATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR, UCLA  
PREVENTIVE MEDICINE TRAINING PROGRAM**

**COMMUNITY-BASED LIFESTYLE  
INTERVENTION NODE LEADER, AIR-P**

# Learning Objectives



- Describe current knowledge and research gaps around physical health and lifestyle interventions for autistic individuals
- Propose research outcomes of interest when talking about community-based lifestyle interventions for autistic individuals
- Describing “community” and resources as it pertains to autistic individuals/their families, and leveraging them in healthful behaviors



# Community-Based Lifestyle Interventions: General Overview

# The Issues



## **Common physical/well-being manifestations in autistic individuals**

- Gastrointestinal problems
- Nutrition quality
- Sleep problems
- Weight management issues (i.e., obesity as well as anorexia)
- Physical inactivity
- Social well-being

**Social Determinants of Health further compound incidence of these conditions**

# Health Status of Autistic Adults

- Compared 1507 autistic adults with 15,070 adults without an autism diagnosis

**Table 2.** Prevalence of psychiatric conditions in adults with ASD and controls.

Psychiatric conditions	Adults with ASD (N= 1507), n (%)	Controls (N= 15,070), n (%)	Chi-square p value	OR <sub>a</sub> (99% CI)*
Alcohol abuse	33 (2.19)	591 (3.92)	0.0008	0.49 (0.31–0.78)
Alcohol dependence	16 (1.06)	296 (1.96)	0.014	0.44 (0.23–0.86)
Anxiety disorder	439 (29.13)	1371 (9.10)	<0.0001	3.69 (3.11–4.36)
Attention deficit disorders	167 (11.08)	294 (1.95)	<0.0001	5.33 (4.08–6.97)
Bipolar disorder	159 (10.55)	251 (1.67)	<0.0001	5.82 (4.41–7.68)
Dementia	34 (2.26)	75 (0.50)	<0.0001	4.40 (2.50–7.71)
Depression	388 (25.75)	1490 (9.89)	<0.0001	2.86 (2.40–3.40)
Drug abuse	39 (2.59)	418 (2.77)	0.67	0.75 (0.48–1.17)
Drug dependence	27 (1.79)	325 (2.16)	0.35	0.66 (0.39–1.12)
Obsessive–compulsive disorder	115 (7.63)	74 (0.49)	<0.0001	14.63 (9.81–21.82)
Other psychoses	95 (6.30)	83 (0.55)	<0.0001	11.81 (7.87–17.73)
Schizophrenic disorders	118 (7.83)	56 (0.37)	<0.0001	22.24 (14.34–34.48)
Suicide attempts	27 (1.79)	48 (0.32)	<0.0001	5.05 (2.67–9.54)

ASD: autism spectrum disorder.

\*OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval; adjusted for sex, age, and race/ethnicity.

**Source:** Croen LA, Zerbo O, Qian Y, et al. The health status of adults on the autism spectrum. *Autism*. 2015;19(7):814-823. doi:10.1177/1362361315577517

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## Health Status of Autistic Adults (contd.)

Edited Reproduction of Table 4: Prevalence of medical conditions among adults with ASD and controls.

Physical Health Conditions	Adults with ASD (N=1507), n (%)	Controls (N=15,070), n (%)	Chi-square p value	OR (99% CI)*
Dyslipidemia	344 (22.83)	2282 (15.14)	<0.001	2.12 (1.74-2.60)
Hypertension	386 (25.61)	2356 (15.63)	<0.001	2.19 (1.81-2.64)
Diabetes	114 (7.56)	653 (4.33)	<0.001	2.18 (1.62-2.93)
Obesity	511 (33.91)	4070 (27.01)	<0.001	1.41 (1.21-1.64)
Constipation	67 (4.45)	210 (1.39)	<0.001	3.11 (2.13-4.54)
GERD	193 (12.81)	1161 (7.70)	<0.001	1.77 (1.42-2.21)
Sleep Disorders	265 (17.58)	1446 (9.60)	<0.001	1.92 (1.58-2.33)
Vitamin Deficiency	75 (4.98)	344 (2.28)	<0.001	2.35 (1.65-3.33)

\*OR=odds ratio, CI=confidence interval; adjusted for sex, age, and race/ethnicity

Source: Croen LA, Zerbo O, Qian Y, et al. The health status of adults on the autism spectrum. *Autism*. 2015;19(7):814-823. doi:10.1177/1362361315577517

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# What is “Lifestyle Medicine?”



## The six pillars of Lifestyle Medicine include:

- Whole Food, Plant-based Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Stress Management
- Avoidance of Risky Substances
- Restorative Sleep
- Social Connection

### LIFESTYLE MEDICINE



### CORE COMPETENCIES



# Defining Community



- Social connectedness has been shown to promote longevity
- Public spaces like schools, parks, libraries, etc. have traditionally been used to build “community”
- What does it mean for an autistic individual to be socially connected?
- What does “community” look like for an autistic individual?



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# Community-Based Lifestyle Interventions: Gaps in the Research

# Pressing Needs in Lifestyle Research

Interventions that work across neurodivergent groups

Longitudinal studies

Exploration of which community sites work best

Expanded scope of focus

Development of relevant and advocate-driven outcome measures

# Node Overview: Community-Based Lifestyle Interventions



The node aims to support, develop and evaluate lifestyle interventions that

- Incorporate the six pillars of lifestyle wellness
- Improve social connectedness
- Promote self-determination and self-advocacy
- Engage advocates, families and communities





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# Community-Based Lifestyle Interventions: Panel Discussion



# Connect with folks from this seminar!

Priyanka Fernandes, MBBS, MPH: [PFernandes@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:PFernandes@mednet.ucla.edu)

Candace Gragnani, MD, MPH: [CGragnani@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:CGragnani@mednet.ucla.edu)

Constance Smith-Hicks, MD, PhD: [hicksc@kennedykrieger.org](mailto:hicksc@kennedykrieger.org)

Heather Brown, PhD: [heather2@ualberta.ca](mailto:heather2@ualberta.ca)

Vanessa Seely, PharmD: [rxnessa@gmail.com](mailto:rxnessa@gmail.com)

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