

FUNCTION JUNCTION: BEHAVIOR MATTERS

October 2022 Research Recap

Interesting news about sleep problems in people with autism:

Autistic people at increased genetic risk of sleep problems by Holly Barker

Autistic children are more likely to have rare variations in genes linked to circadian rhythms and insomnia than are their unaffected siblings, according to a new study. Many children with autism have trouble sleeping, which may exacerbate other challenges associated with the condition (e.g., aggression, anxiety). Sleep problems hint at disruptions in the circadian clock, a cellular timer that keeps cells in sync with the day-night cycle.

This study took a “unique perspective” by analyzing genetic data from 5,860 autistic children and 2,092 of their unaffected siblings from two genetic repositories. The study also included genetic information from 7,509 teenagers and adults from the general population. Compared with their unaffected siblings and unrelated controls, the children with autism had more deletions in DNA that are associated with insomnia.

Cissy and Susan found this so interesting because they see so many students who appear exhausted at school, despite reports from parents stating no changes in diet, medication, or bedtimes. Perhaps this could help explain tiredness a bit differently to educators, behavior analysts, and parents.

