

The cost of caring

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Parents of children with autism are more likely to get common ailments such as colds, coughs and headaches as a direct result of the increased stresses linked to their caring duties, according to research from Northumbria University.

The research is published in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, this April which is also National [Autism](#) month.

In the first study to look at the physical and psychological well-being of

these carers, psychologists Dr. Mark Wetherell, Dr. Mark Moss and PhD researcher Brian Lovell also discovered higher levels of C-reactive protein in the carers, a marker of inflammation that is linked to increased risk of developing coronary heart disease and diabetes.

Dr. Wetherell said: “[Parents](#) of children with autism face tremendous physical, financial, emotional and social pressures and these can lead to prolonged activation of stress responses which might place them at greater risk of adverse health outcomes.

“The consequences of these effects are far-reaching and can influence the ability of the caregiver to provide consistent, effective and sustainable care for their child.”

In a separate study, published in the April edition of *Research in Developmental Disabilities* the team discovered that carers with lower levels of social support experienced greater levels of stress, depression and anxiety and more common ailments.

The team is now to embark on a new research project looking at how writing about their emotions can have a positive impact on carers’ wellbeing. Those taking part in the research will be asked to provide saliva and blood samples and write for 20 minutes for three days on an assigned topic.

More information: Anyone interested in taking part in the research is asked to contact Brian Lovell (brian.lovell@northumbria.ac.uk) or Dr. Wetherell on (mark.wetherell@northumbria.ac.uk)

Provided by Northumbria University

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