

A large, dark grey silhouette of a brain is the central focus. It is surrounded by several colorful orbits and nodes. There are three pink orbits: one with a purple node at the top left, one with a green node at the bottom center containing the number '1', and one with a pink node at the bottom left. There are also two teal orbits: one with an orange node at the top right and one with a teal node at the bottom right. The text 'AUTISM & CHRONIC ILLNESS' is written in a bold, light blue font across the center of the brain silhouette.

# AUTISM & CHRONIC ILLNESS

1


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**A conversation we are  
starting to see more**

**2**

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A stylized brain graphic in dark grey/black, surrounded by colorful orbits and nodes. The orbits are in shades of pink, blue, and purple. There are four nodes: a purple one at the top left, an orange one at the top right, a green one at the bottom center, and a blue one at the bottom right. The text is centered within the brain shape.


**Many autistic people are not only navigating a neurotype. They're also navigating chronic pain, fatigue, gastrointestinal conditions, autoimmune illnesses, hypermobility, migraines, dysautonomia, sleep disorders, and other long-term health conditions. For many of us, autism never arrives alone.**



**THE STATISTICS ARE  
HARD TO IGNORE**

**4**

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A large, dark grey brain-shaped graphic is centered on the page. It is surrounded by several colorful nodes (purple, orange, green) connected to it by thin, curved lines in shades of pink, blue, and purple. The text is written in a bold, yellow font inside the brain shape.

**Research suggests that between 60% and 95% of autistic people experience one or more co-occurring medical, developmental, or mental health conditions.**

**In other words:**

**Co-occurrence is common.**

**Being autistic and chronically ill is not unusual. It is part of many autistic people's everyday reality.**

**(Autism Awareness Australia, 2026)**



**THIS IS NOT ABOUT  
"CAUSING"**

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**When we talk about autism and chronic illness together, we need nuance.**

**Autism does not automatically "cause" chronic illness. And chronic illness definitely does not "cause" autism. Researchers are exploring possible overlaps involving: genetics, connective tissue differences, immune system function, autonomic nervous system regulation, sensory processing, stress and burnout.**

**Many questions remain unanswered.**

**The relationship is complex, and science is still catching up.**

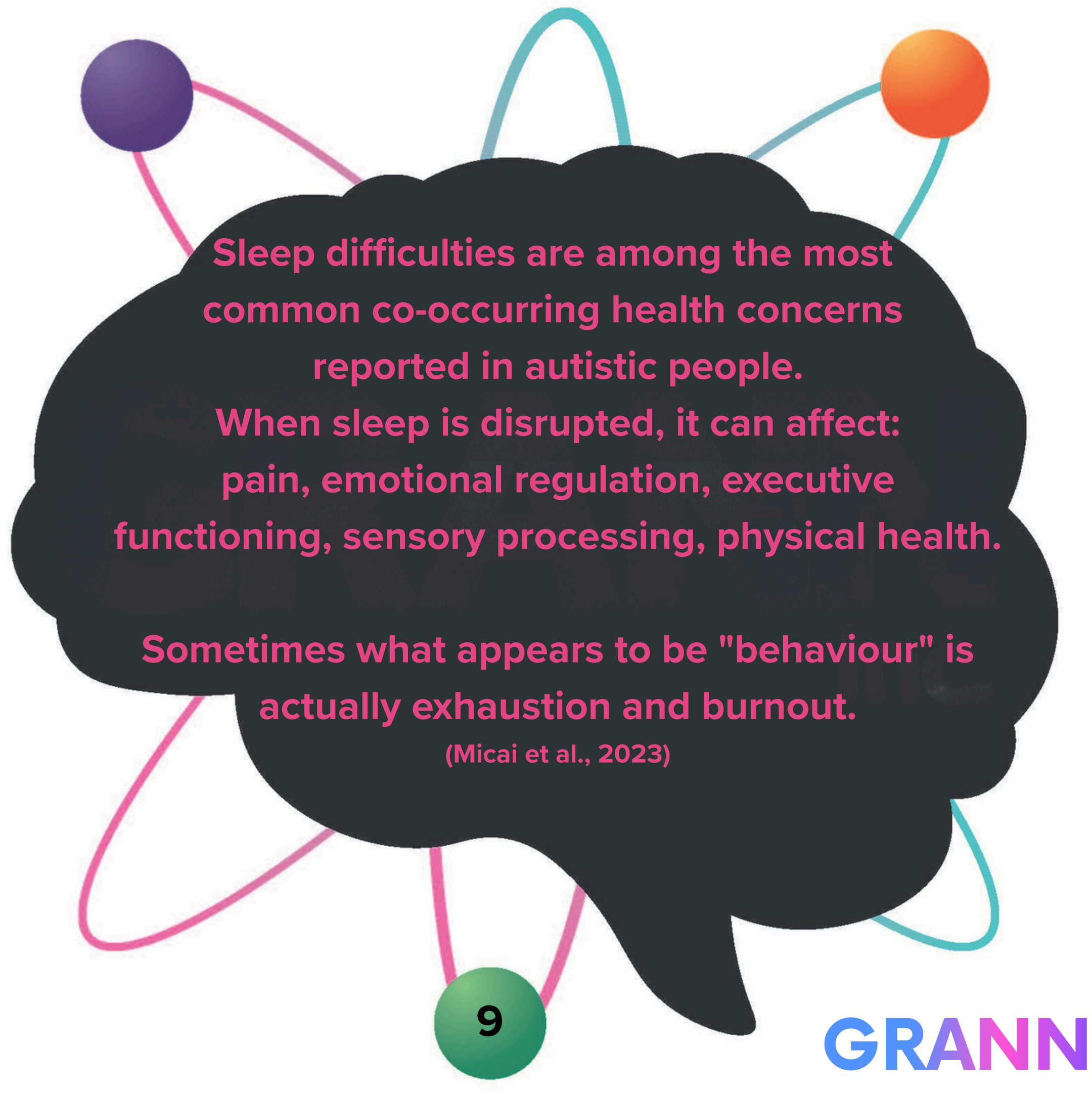
**(Micai et al., 2023)**

A large, dark grey silhouette of a brain is the central focus. It is surrounded by several colorful orbits and nodes. A purple node is connected to the brain by a pink line. An orange node is connected by a teal line. A green node at the bottom is connected by a pink line and contains the number '8'. There are also two teal orbits and one pink orbit without nodes.

**SLEEP IS A HEALTH  
ISSUE**

8

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**Sleep difficulties are among the most common co-occurring health concerns reported in autistic people.**

**When sleep is disrupted, it can affect: pain, emotional regulation, executive functioning, sensory processing, physical health.**

**Sometimes what appears to be "behaviour" is actually exhaustion and burnout.**


**(Micai et al., 2023)**



**THE CONNECTIONS  
MANY AUTISTIC PEOPLE  
ALREADY KNOW**

**10**

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**Across autistic communities,  
conversations frequently emerge about:**

- hypermobility
- connective tissue disorders
- Ehlers-Danlos syndromes
- POTS and other forms of dysautonomia
- chronic fatigue
- migraines
- gastrointestinal conditions

**Research increasingly suggests these  
overlaps deserve serious investigation  
rather than dismissal.**


**(Autism Central NHS, 2026)**

A large, dark grey, brain-shaped graphic is centered on the page. It is surrounded by several colorful nodes (purple, orange, green) connected by thin lines, resembling a network or neural connections. The text 'THE INVISIBLE COST OF MASKING' is written in a bold, light blue font across the center of the brain.

# THE INVISIBLE COST OF MASKING

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**Many autistic people spend years or decades being told:**

**"You're fine."**

**"Everyone feels like that."**

**"You're just anxious."**

**"You're overreacting."**

**When chronic illness and autism coexist, symptoms can be misunderstood, minimised, or attributed to stress alone.**

**This can delay diagnosis, support, treatment, and understanding.**

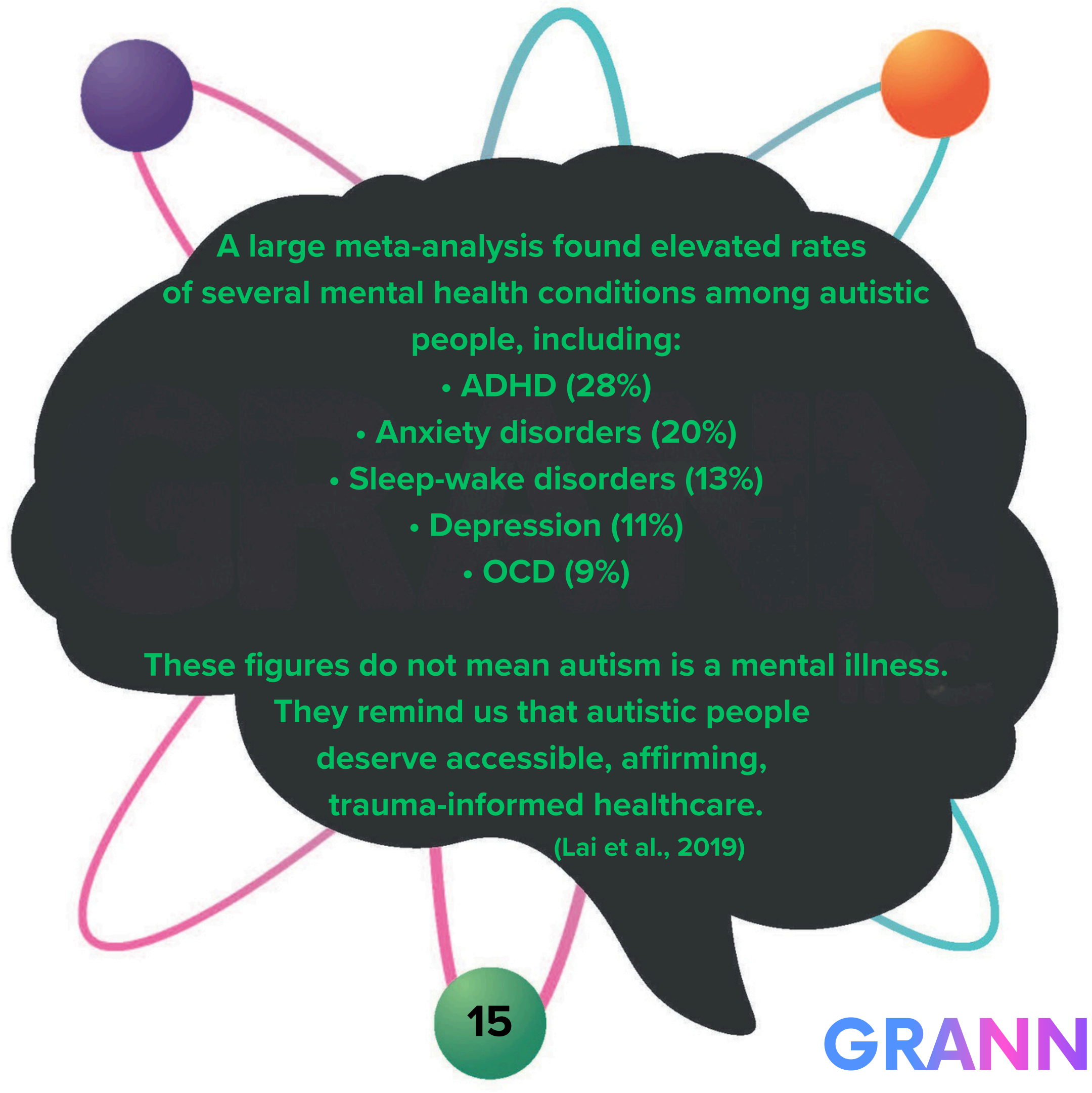
**For some people, receiving answers is life-changing.**

A large, dark grey silhouette of a brain is the central focus. It is surrounded by several colorful orbits and nodes. A purple node is connected to the brain by a pink line. An orange node is connected by a light blue line. A green node at the bottom is connected by a pink line. There are also two light blue orbits and one pink orbit that do not connect to any nodes. The text 'MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS TOO' is written in a bold, green, sans-serif font across the middle of the brain silhouette.

**MENTAL HEALTH  
MATTERS TOO**

**14**

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A large, dark grey brain silhouette is the central focus. It is surrounded by several colorful orbits and nodes. A purple node is at the top left, an orange node is at the top right, and a green node is at the bottom center. Lines connect these nodes to the brain, forming loops. The text is written in a bright green color.

**A large meta-analysis found elevated rates of several mental health conditions among autistic people, including:**

- **ADHD (28%)**
- **Anxiety disorders (20%)**
- **Sleep-wake disorders (13%)**
- **Depression (11%)**
- **OCD (9%)**

**These figures do not mean autism is a mental illness.**

**They remind us that autistic people deserve accessible, affirming, trauma-informed healthcare.**

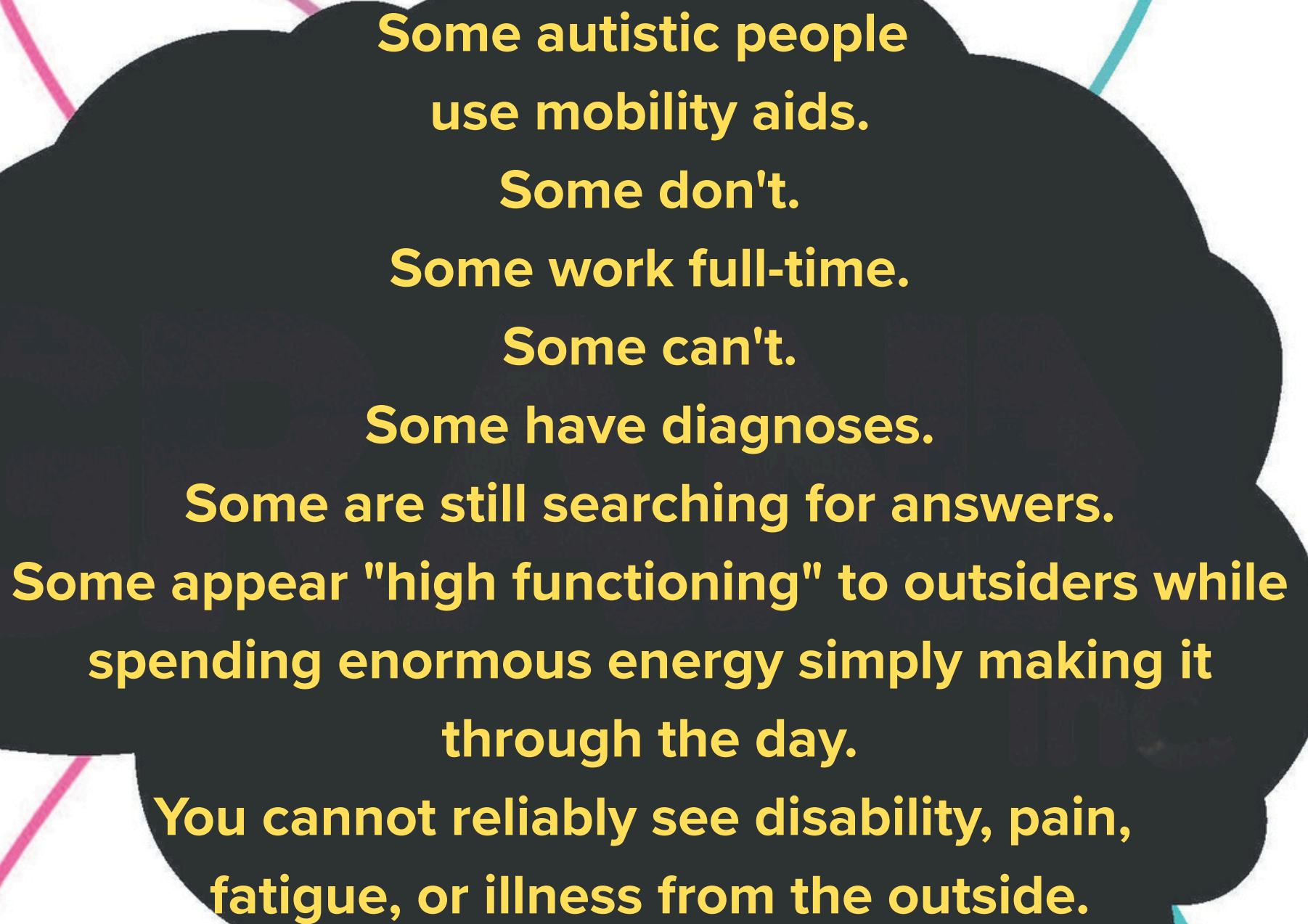
**(Lai et al., 2019)**



**CHRONIC ILLNESS  
DOESN'T LOOK ONE  
WAY**

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**Some autistic people  
use mobility aids.  
Some don't.  
Some work full-time.  
Some can't.  
Some have diagnoses.  
Some are still searching for answers.  
Some appear "high functioning" to outsiders while  
spending enormous energy simply making it  
through the day.  
You cannot reliably see disability, pain,  
fatigue, or illness from the outside.**

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# WHAT AUTISTIC PEOPLE OFTEN SAY

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**"I thought everyone was this exhausted."**

**"I didn't realise pain wasn't normal."**

**"I spent years believing I was lazy."**

**"I kept being told it was anxiety."**

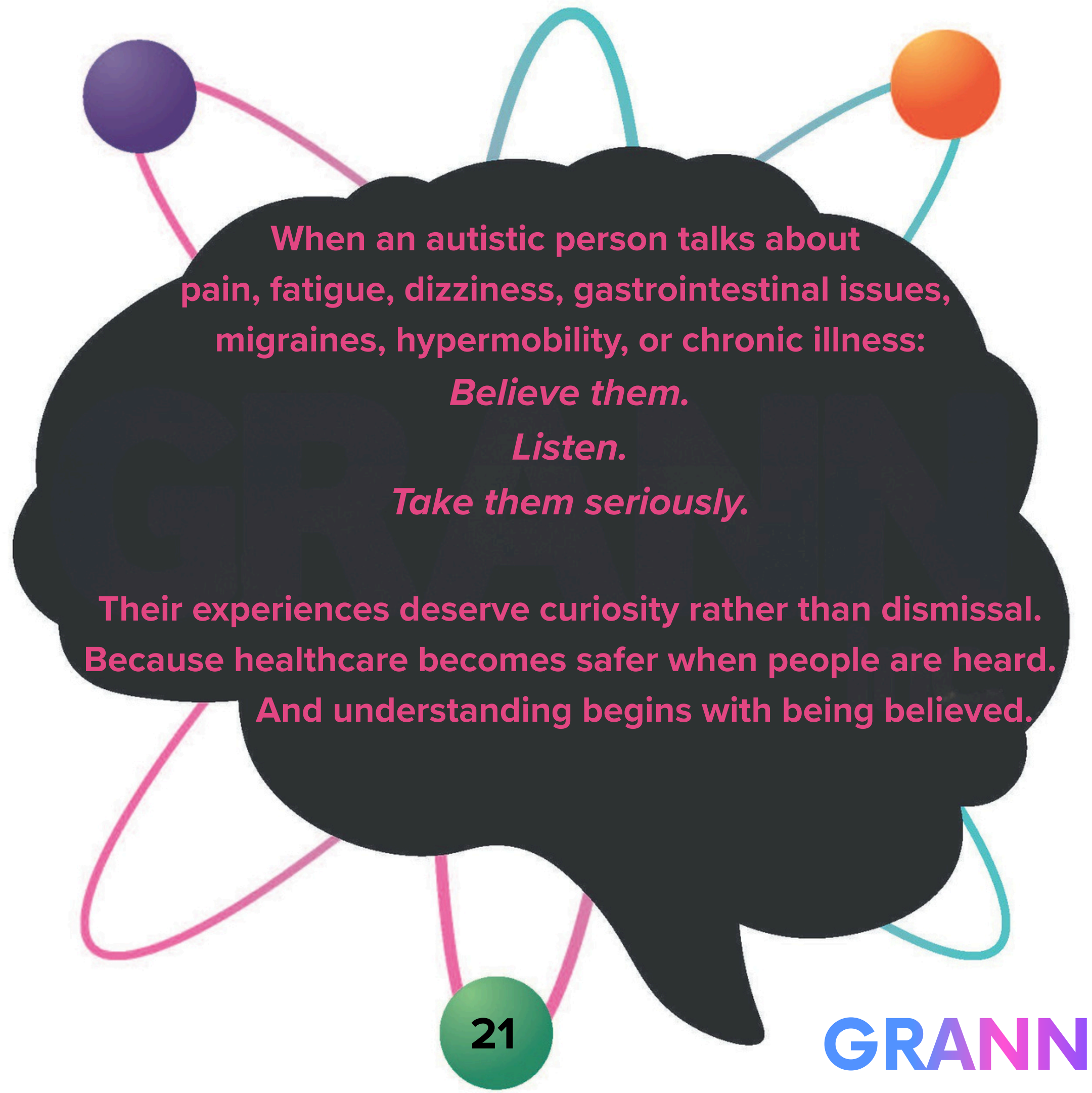
**Behind many late diagnoses are years of self-doubt.  
Sometimes understanding begins when someone  
finally listens.**

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# A GENTLE REMINDER

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**When an autistic person talks about pain, fatigue, dizziness, gastrointestinal issues, migraines, hypermobility, or chronic illness:**

***Believe them.***

***Listen.***

***Take them seriously.***

**Their experiences deserve curiosity rather than dismissal. Because healthcare becomes safer when people are heard. And understanding begins with being believed.**