

# Monotropism

**Social Media Project led by  
Autistic Realms July 2023:**

**As an autistic person how would  
you describe monotropism or your  
experience of being monotropic?**



# Monotropism

## Social Media Project led by Autistic Realms July 2023 responses

The following pages are replies from my Twitter and Facebook adverts July 2023. The advert was a copy of the the front cover of this e-book.

I hope you enjoy reading people's different experiences and interpretations of monotropism. A related blog will be posted on my website.

[www.autisticrealms.com](http://www.autisticrealms.com)

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# Monotropism

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I often describe my experience of monotropism as not living in a moderate space, I'm 'on' or I'm 'off', like a light switch not a dimmer. I can't exist in the middle.



# Monotropism

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When I'm deep in my monotropic spin it's a feeling of joy a lot like being in love. There's a momentum like it's carrying me forward.



# Monotropism

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(Monotropism) is an increase in interest and salience, as being totally absorbed, in a flow state (unless rudely interrupted and then one can get the opposite). Some interests become more embedded and become long-term familiar patterns of activity.



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I describe them as flowy attention tunnels which link together into really smooth enjoyable days.

I shape my life around my tunnels. I'm always either playing or enjoying an adventure. Organising my life this way has enabled me to thrive.



# Monotropism

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My monotropic focus is kind of like a rubber band. It takes a bit of time and effort to wrap the rubber band around the thing I'm trying to focus on, but once it's securely attached, I notice nothing else. 1/4



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Shifting to a new activity or subject takes time, because I have to unravel the rubber band from the first thing and re-wrap it around the new thing. If I try to shift too quickly (skipping the unwrapping process), the rubber band just snaps my focus back to the first thing. I may appear as if I've switched tasks, but my brain hasn't! 2/4





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And I only have one rubber band. Multitasking is like trying to hold multiple spherically-shaped objects in the same rubber band at the same time. In attempting to secure all of them, I will end up securing none of them. 3/4



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This unraveling & rewrapping process happens hundreds of times each day. I'm walking down the street and someone says hello: unravel & rewrap. I'm working on one task & need to switch to another: unravel & rewrap. I'm reading about one subject & need to switch to a new one...etc 4/4



# Monotropism

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Monotropism for me is being in a secure sensory bubble in that I feel consumed by the thing I'm immersed in. All things outside that bubble dull, disappear, dissipate, become quieter and my brain becomes louder and more interconnected with its ideas. If someone pops that bubble, those connected parts detach again. That's infuriating.



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Interruptions are my kryptonite.

Being-in-the eternal here and now.

I used to simply say I have difficulty getting OUT of the moment.



# Monotropism

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For me it's like stepping through the wardrobe into Narnia. Total immersion in a world, whatever that may be at the time - a book, a piece of writing I'm doing, research, or even walking in nature. If I am distracted it's like radio static, and I struggle to tune back in.



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(Monotropism) is like a magnet stuck fast. Been there in both my professional and personal life resulting in burnout that lasted many months. I've learned now to give myself a daily stopping point for meditation that seems to break the cycle.



# Monotropism

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I wish I could tune out some of the noises surrounding me. I don't like it when people talk over each other.

Their voices become chaos in my mind, and I can't focus.



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I still have to research the meaning of the theory itself more, but I struggle with the term tropism... it comes from mechanistic biology which was convincing contested about a hundred years ago by other strands of theoretical biology. in just a couple words, tropism is for instance what drives sunflowers to turn towards the sun, it's a chemical-physical mechanism, not a lived experience... so the word makes autistic behaviour appear as reflexes or worse, thoughtless mechanisms. That said, I relate a lot to a notion like hyperfocus, which I assume is close enough to monotropism? Or at least part of it?





# Monotropism

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Very simply, for me, it's once I'm interested in something then that's all I want to do, read about, think about, research. It's really hard to do mundane tasks, my mind is constantly jumping to when can I focus on my special interest again.



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I was about to comment that I don't experience this...then I came across the article on "Meerkat Mode". Yup that's me.

(In reference to Adkin, T. & Gray-Hammond, D. (2023), What is meerkat mode and how does it relate to AuDHD  
<https://emergentdivergence.com>)



# Monotropism

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I also have adhd and gifted so it's like take the 17 lines of thought I have at once and focus so hard on them that the outside world ceases to exist and then have all of them combine into one lengthy infodump that must be done to be "released" but only at 11pm. Then the only way I am soothed is by repeatedly listening to the same sound over and over for 2 hours.

Then add a human mask of a neurotypical to conceal a non normative brain type and add monotropic hyperfocus on adding a human mask of a neurotypical to conceal a non normative brain type and the monotropism creates burnout and a loss of sense of self.

Then add a monotropic focus ON autism and monotropism and a recursive loop of monotropically processing monotropism and 30 years later you have the coping strategy of "hey, hmm just give me a bit of time to think about that"

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Lack of acknowledgement/interest shown by loved ones to my interests is incredibly frustrating. And sudden demands to switch off and do something else is like being dragged on a ski lift when you aren't ready.

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The weight of everything melts away; peace, energy, focus ebb, then flow in, filling the space until it is entirely complete. I'm still present, yet also in a different place, different space. Time circles around me; fluid & in flux. Memories, senses sharpen; clarify & clarity.

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Flowing along, unaware of separation and then.. either my flow gets abruptly interrupted (everything fragments into puzzling non related bits) or something tugs at my awareness and I want to know it more fully. If its a tug I feel immersive joy, if it's a jolt I feel lost.

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I get 'tangled' in personal projects and until those are complete it's extremely hard to get onto other things. The harder life feels at the time, the harder it is to shift my attention, to the point that necessary aspects of life such as self care, house care gets overlooked. And the same goes for when my (mind) decides that it's 'done' with something... getting to it and continue working feels impossible. Also to note that by 'complete' I mean as 'my brain feels that it's finished'... so in either example above this can be a project that's halfway through and I completely let it go or something that others might consider "finished' but it doesn't 'feel' finished, so I'll keep changing, adding until it 'feels' complete

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...There are those of us who weren't allowed to be monotropic and suffer for it. When I first heard of monotropism I thought "people are allowed to concentrate on one thing? Not forced to multi task?"

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Small child obsessed with reading/stories

Ages 8-12 tried learning languages on my own to read (especially Japanese as an anime nerd)

Begged to take all available languages in high school got French and German.

Dropped out of school

Bachelor's in German minor in French

Work at world market get to practice German a couple times a week

Languages and stories are my monotropic interests and my main "daily life success" comes from them.

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I only learned of monotropism recently but it described me and my processes very accurately. I can only focus on one thing at a time, deal with one problem at a time, enjoy one thing at a time, etc. I have been forcing myself all my life to multi-task and be varied in my activities only to have always been two steps behind because I cannot truly cope with it all. The older I get the harder it gets too. This explains why work has always been all consuming for me and I struggle when I have a job that doesn't give me the space to focus or get enough intellectual stimulation from it. If I hate my job, everything else falls apart, if I love my job, I am happy and take it as my special interest.

When I first discovered about my autism, all I could think about was that, all I wanted to do was research and introspect. When I had to move home in April, I had to take two weeks off from work because my brain could not deal with anything other than moving.

I love being like this but it is not compatible with the outside world.

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I have been forcing myself not to pursue my special interests for several weeks because I know if I start, I won't stop, and I /need/ to finish my dissertation. It makes me really sad, but right now, it's necessary.

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I tend to hyperfixate which is like being in a frenzy and a trance at the same time. I'll be completely uninterested in friends, partner, job etc and spend every moment every day thinking or engaging in the project until suddenly I'll run out of battery and leave it to the side.

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I really like the idea of autistic inertia, which is only loosely related but relevant: it's the idea that we need to build inertia for any given task, and once we do it's harder to stop (making transitions harder). This can contribute to monotropism in that once we get into a topic, we may find it easier to "keep it running in the background," so to speak, rather than fully closing that window. Then it's easier to go back to that topic than to start a new one.

I'd also say that a special interest can feel like it charges our batteries," rather than requiring energy; if we find such a topic, we take every opportunity to engage with it because it gives us \*more\* energy, and in contrast, other tasks/interests feel that much less desirable because they require spending energy.

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When I am in a state of Monotropic flow everything is as it should be and I feel both at peace, and invigorated. It's clear that this is how my mind is designed to work

When I'm forced into a heavy Polytropic state my brain is in distress, being forced into operating in a way it's not suited to. It causes significant stress and overwhelm, and I quickly burn through energy as I try to push through.

It's like the difference between skiing on snow, or attempting to ski through mud.

Technically I might be able to make it work, but it's not going to end well.

When things get heavily out of balance, and I spend too much time in forced Polytropic states, and not enough time in Monotropic flow, this drives me towards Autistic Burnout.

Once I reach that point the overwhelm is total, and it's almost impossible to function, impacting all areas of my life.

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Singular focus that nothing can intrude into. Life falls away and I keep burrowing deeper.

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This is my first time encountering this word, but I googled it and I feel so seen

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The evaporation of time hits me like a wave of heat scorching my brain directly, especially when deadlines approach.

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For me it's utterly absorption. I am the thing, not doing it but being it whether that's writing or playing piano etc. I'm there , utterly focused and yet somewhere beyond. I'm Autistic and ADHD so sometimes I have (hard to explain) more than one parallel monotropic state bouncing off each other at the same creating one new merged fluid state (eg writing when utterly lost in music)

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Tunnel vision on my focused interests.

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# Monotropism

Do you want to find out more?

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism. Autism, 9(2), 139–156.

<https://monotropism.org/>

<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/me-and-monotropism-unified-theory-autism>

<https://stimpunks.org/glossary/monotropism/>



# Monotropism

Do you want to find out more?

<https://saltformysquid.com/monotropism/>

<https://www.autisticrealms.com/post/monotropism-happy-flow-state>

<https://autismunderstood.co.uk/autistic-differences/monotropism/>

<https://youtu.be/qUFDAevkd3E> (Kieran Rose Monotropism)



# Monotropism

Do you want to find out more?

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8371670-the-passionate-mind>

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6111675-what-i-want-to-talk-about?  
from search=true&from\\_srp=true&qid=FQ4D2RIRbV&rank=2](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6111675-what-i-want-to-talk-about?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=FQ4D2RIRbV&rank=2)

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/52280818-inclusive-education-for-  
autistic-children?](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/52280818-inclusive-education-for-autistic-children?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=imPqevvwpZ&rank=1)

[from search=true&from\\_srp=true&qid=imPqevvwpZ&rank=1](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/52280818-inclusive-education-for-autistic-children?from_search=true&from_srp=true&qid=imPqevvwpZ&rank=1)



# Monotropism

Do you want to find out more?

<https://oolong.medium.com/craft-flow-and-cognitive-styles-a47f827fcd6a>

<https://www.youtube.com/live/cEtLOGcTAoA?feature=share> (Aucademy on Monotropism)

<https://emergentdivergence.com/?s=monotropism>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/pofbt947> (BBC Podcast with Dr Wenn Lawson and Jamie Knight 'Monotropism Changed my Life')





# Monotropism

Social Media Project led by Helen Edgar Autistic Realms July 2023

Posts shared on Autistic Realms Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Responses gathered from replies to the social media project advert.

[https://twitter.com/autisticrealms/status/1676135935484780544?s=46&t=OtnJm\\_i6RmnJaG6leO\\_SnA](https://twitter.com/autisticrealms/status/1676135935484780544?s=46&t=OtnJm_i6RmnJaG6leO_SnA)

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Thank you to everyone that took part and shared their understanding and experiences of monotropism.

I will explore these replies in a future blog which will be open access on my website soon.

It has been wonderful to read everyone's interpretations and descriptions of monotropism. I hope you find it valuable and interesting too. More coming soon!

Thank you, Helen x

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