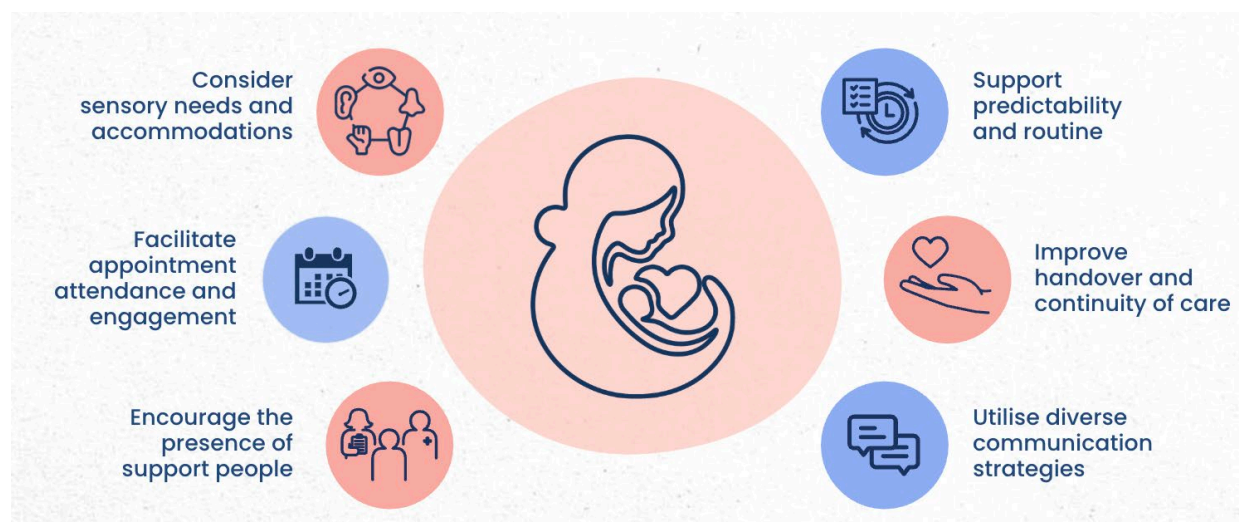


# Strategies to support Autistic people during pregnancy



## Consider sensory needs and accommodations

- Ask first! Find out what their sensory needs are.
- Encourage the use of noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, or weighted items to increase comfort.
- Avoid wearing perfume or highly scented cosmetics or toiletries.
- Offer alternatives for physical examinations (e.g. self-administered swabs where clinically appropriate or allow them to wipe off the gel from an ultrasound themselves).
- Be mindful of sensory sensitivities to lighting, noise, textures, and physical touch during examinations.
- Provide additional physical space where proximity to others is reduced, such as a private room.



## Facilitate appointment attendance and engagement

- Offer flexible scheduling options, including telehealth appointments where appropriate.
- Offer longer appointments so they have more time to ask questions and take in new information.
- Minimise waiting times and provide quiet spaces to wait (e.g. an empty room or waiting in the car) to reduce sensory stress. Update them on how long they may need to wait.
- Offering the first appointment of the day to reduce waiting times and sensory stress.
- If it's their first visit, they may appreciate information before the visit about what to expect. This can be done as a phone call, a document sent to them, or a short tour at a time you both organize.



## Encourage the presence of support people

- Allow support people to attend in-person or via phone/video if preferred.
- Ensure that support roles are respected and incorporated into care planning.
- Consider connecting them with a doula or private midwife as a birth support person who could provide continuity of care to get to know them.



## Support predictability and routine

- At their first appointment provide an outline of what to expect at subsequent appointments, including duration, procedures, and any required tests.
- Provide written summaries, checklists, or visual schedules to help individuals prepare for upcoming visits.
- Avoid unexpected changes where possible, and communicate any necessary changes in advance.
- Offer advance tours of appointment spaces, labour rooms, surgical areas, and other relevant environments to help familiarise individuals with the setting and reduce anxiety.



## Improve handover and continuity of care

- If continuity of care is not possible, help the individual have continuity of care through a trusted GP where appropriate (shared care).
- Use patient-held records, shared care plans, or digital communication tools to facilitate continuity across services.
- Work collaboratively with multidisciplinary teams, including midwives, obstetricians, GPs, lactation consultants, and mental health professionals to be sure that preferences, accommodations, and needs don't need to be repeated across all professionals.
- Continuity of care can be supported by facilitating a transition to a replacement healthcare professional, when needed. For example, if a staff member is going on leave and they will have a new midwife.



## Utilise diverse communication strategies

- Ask about and respect individual communication preferences (e.g. written over spoken communication, use of Augmented and Alternative Communication (AAC), or structured conversations).
- Avoid using body language, gestures or facial expressions without using accompanying spoken, typed or written instructions.
- Provide key information in multiple formats.
- Use direct, clear, and concise language while avoiding ambiguous or overly general statements. Autistic people may take you literally, for example if you say "It will only hurt for one minute", they may expect the pain to be over in exactly one minute.
- Give direct requests such as 'Please stand up' rather than 'Can you stand up?'. They might reply 'yes' but stay seated as they are not aware you are asking them to do something.
- Always explain what you are going to do before starting any procedure or examination. Check their understanding, ask them to repeat it back to you if necessary.
- Be patient – allow enough time for questions. When a question is asked, increase the wait time for a response.
- Always ask for consent and check and re-check for consent. Don't assume if consent has been given once that it applies in all circumstances.