

Motor deficits and other body issues

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My body is its own challenge, all by itself. It's not only always restless, it's not coordinated. I have trouble doing basic tasks such as tying my shoes or tearing open a bag of chips. It's hard for me to do the tiny hand movement needed to write or do precise tasks. It's like my hands are baseball mitts or banana fingers. I feel so miserable that ordinary tasks are out of reach because it makes me delay my independence. My mind knows what it wants to do but my clumsy fingers don't cooperate. It's so frustrating to be twelve and to need someone's help to get my shoes tied. It reminds me every morning that I'm so disabled and often I become sort of depressed.

It's not just fine motor that is a challenge. My gross motor skills are slow too. I'm working out now to strengthen my muscles because autistic people have low muscle tone. I'm strong, but not fit. It's a lot like a car with a good motor but a leaky carburetor. I'm capable of getting in shape but I need to repair my deficits. In school we never worked on getting in shape. Adaptive P.E. is another formula for sadness.

I can't do coordinated movements yet such as shooting a basket or chasing a moving ball so I feel oppositional in adaptive P.E. (physical fitness class modified for students with disabilities). The expert teacher notices I can't do things so he tries to help me do things like a typical kid. The typical kid's got a working carburetor so his body responds to his instructions. Now the teacher tries to make me do something without repairing my carburetor first, so he pushes me to try. It's a big leap to throw a basketball into a basket if I struggle to feel my arms' positions, so I miss over and over. The expert tells my aide that I'm lazy and I feel so mad. He really has no clue.

The trainer I see is helping me to strengthen my body in incremental steps. I see my strength increasing and my coordination is also improving. He thinks first about my deficits before working on something. This means that I get stronger before leaping to a skill that is now out of reach. I'm so weary of experts that have no idea what the challenges of their students are. Instead they judge us.

I'm not sure where my body is if my eyes are shut. I must see my hands to know where they are. It's sort of terrible to open my eyes and see my body somewhere in space when I thought it was somewhere else. I see where something is so I can move to it, but sometimes I don't see where something is and my body moves to the wrong thing as if it had its own mind. Then I pick up the wrong thing instead. The result is that I robotically keep moving the wrong way, both to my surprise and frustration. I react in confusion because I can't understand why my body is in the wrong place. Time after time people assume that I don't understand simple words when they see me move wrong. Understanding is not the problem. It's that my body finds its own route when my mind can't find it.

Excerpt from Ido in Autismland by Ido Kedar