

*Sensory-friendly
ways for autistic
people to embrace
makeup*



For many of us, wearing makeup is a powerful and fun way of expressing ourselves and showing creativity. But for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), there can be a few added complexities.

Join us as we look at some reasons why people with ASD may or may not choose to wear makeup, along with some sensory-friendly makeup tips.

Makeup to express, or mask, your true self

The artistry of makeup can be a wonderful outlet for autistic people to convey their emotions, personality and perspectives in a non-verbal way. Embracing particular styles can also help people connect with others and feel part of specific communities or special interest groups in the worlds of music, gaming, culture, and many more.

But, while for some makeup can enhance self-confidence, for others it can be a form of masking. Masking means hiding or disguising part of yourself to better fit in with those around you. Everybody does it to some extent, but it is often more common among autistic people.

Using makeup as a masking tool often begins in adolescence as a response to societal pressure to 'fit in' at school and can continue into the world of work and social situations. Using makeup to mask can help people with ASD navigate these situations, but masking for extended periods can be exhausting and adversely affect mental health.

Sharing stories, finding support

Online communities are a great place to share experiences and get support from other people with ASD. Makeup is a topic that regularly pops up on message boards and Reddit threads dedicated to autism, from issues surrounding society's expectation to wear makeup to the sensory challenges of wearing it.

By reading and getting involved in these discussions, autistic people can feel more understood, while also picking up tips from other users.



A more inclusive beauty industry

The beauty and cosmetics worlds are becoming more aware of the need to cater for neurodiverse people, and there are more and more beauty bloggers, makeup tutorial YouTubers and influencers who are autistic.

Sophie Baverstock, the 2021 winner of BBC's makeup show *Glow Up*, credits the show as a way to come out publicly about her autism. She also says her condition helps in her art: "I think it helps me focus on what I'm doing. I have a very clear idea of what I want."

Elsewhere, Leanne Libas (@callmemisslibas on Instagram) regularly takes down stereotypes surrounding autism and shares makeup tutorials, while Taylor Heaton (AKA @momonthespectrum) touches upon numerous topics, including masking and sensory-friendly makeup tips on her YouTube channel, which has 75k subscribers.



Makeup: a sensory question

Autism affects people in many different ways, and the sensory aspect of makeup can provoke different responses too.

Some people find applying and experimenting with makeup calming – the feeling of brushes, sponges, and other makeup tools can provide pleasant sensations, and the daily routine of applying makeup can be comforting.

However, for others, the smells and textures of cosmetic products can cause sensory overload and become distressing. Itching, concerns over infections, discomfort with the feeling of nail polish, and the desire to eat or lick off flavoured lip balm or lipstick are just some of the issues people with ASD can face.



Sensory-friendly makeup

Here are some tips for anyone with sensory sensitivities who want to use makeup:

Lips: Lip liner, lip stain or tinted lip balm can provide a lighter alternative to lipstick or gloss, the texture of which some can find unappealing.

Skin: Liquid foundation can feel too thick, while powder foundation can feel a bit itchy. Instead, a tinted moisturiser providing a much lighter coverage, or buildable foundation applied in thin layers, may be preferable.

Eyes: Matte cream eyeshadow has less texture than sparkly powder-based choices, while some people prefer 'tubing' mascara, which coats the individual lash, rather than sticking them together.

Nails: Peel-off nail polish can be removed quickly if the sensation becomes unpleasant. It also avoids the need for the harsh smells and rubbing associated with nail polish remover.

