



# Autistic inertia: What we know so far

# Outline

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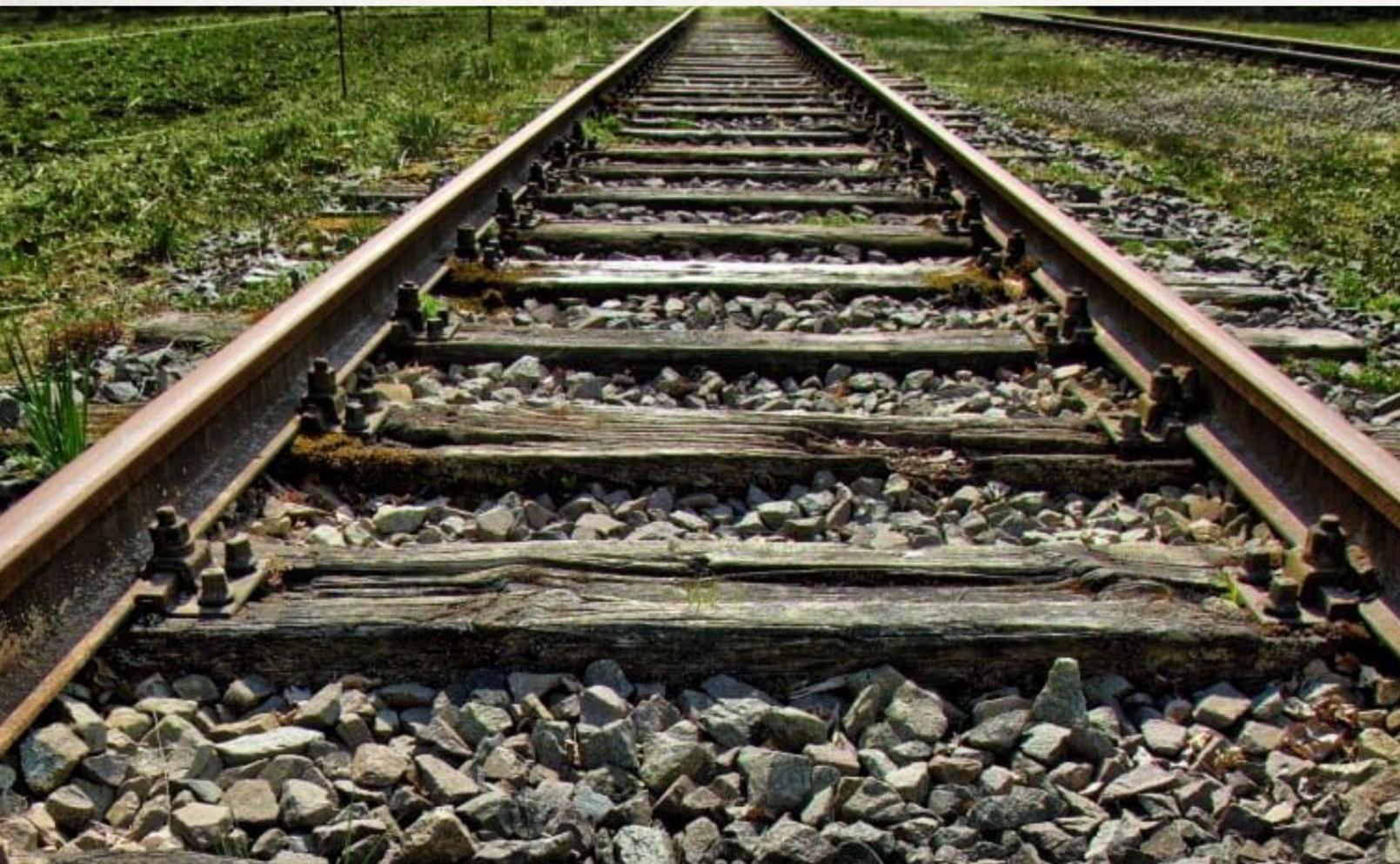
# Introduction

- ❖ Involved in Autscape since the start, parent, researcher
- ❖ I am autistic and have quite bad inertia
- ❖ Studying for my PhD
- ❖ Talked to many people at Autscape and in online groups



Part 1: What do I mean by 'inertia'?

# What do I mean by 'inertia'?



- ❖ Difficulty starting, stopping or changing
- ❖ Common in autistic people, but not specific to autism
- ❖ Unable to act on intentions
- ❖ Unable to break away to do something else.
- ❖ This is one of autism's biggest assets if the focus is something desirable (e.g. work)

I will decide that I should stop and I want to stop and I'm not enjoying what I'm doing... and then continue to do it for quite a while.

Difficult to separate the "blob" of "lots to do" into small, potentially doable bits.

I also can't overcome my inertia. I have to wait for it to go away.

It's like I withdraw into myself then watching myself from another place, and so the body is stuck.



**Tendency to maintain one state**

**Difficulty finding the first step**

**Lack of voluntary control**

**Disconnection between intention and action**

# What autistic inertia is



My inertia has got worse as I've got older and I think burnout is at least part of that

Lying in bed, unable to move and feeling thirsty... even as I'm conscious of being thirsty, I still can't do anything about it.

I think if there's a high background level of anxiety anyway then it's not wanting to expose myself to a lot more.

When there's a lot of noise and other things going on, I seem to have less cognitive space in order to deal with things.



**Constantly exhausted**

**Difficulty meeting needs**

**Effects of (and on) emotions**

**Stress and overload**

Effects on how the person feels



**Expectations of other people**



What helps me is having another person present... Just working side by side just kind of motivates me.

**Activity in the environment**



I end up just sitting and not doing anything... till there's an external interruption... then I'll be like, 'Oh, I should move now.'

What makes it better or worse



**Difficulty  
maintaining  
relationships**



All relationships... only work if the other person is prepared to do a massively disproportionate amount of the initiating.

**Reduced  
productivity**



I cannot work and have friends and maintain the house all at the same time. I just can't do it.

Effects on how the person lives



“I think I kind of sum it up as my life is probably a lot smaller and less than I would like it to be.”

## Part 2: What helps

# Getting unstuck



**Reduce  
stress**

**Use  
continuity**

**Compatible  
prompts**

**External  
support**

**Lower  
threshold**



# Conclusion

- ❖ Tendency to get stuck doing or not doing
- ❖ Different underlying reasons:
  - ❖ Physical or mental health difficulties, fatigue and burnout
  - ❖ Difficulty planning, hyperfocus, and difficulty switching attention
  - ❖ Motor initiation problems
- ❖ Things that can help:
  - ❖ Reducing stress
  - ❖ Routine, structure and a general rhythm of activity
  - ❖ Being needed for something specific and time-bound
  - ❖ Reducing number of transitions

