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Health & Fitness

Asperger's Syndrome and Alcohol: Drinking To Cope
Matthew Tinsley
Sarah Hendrickx
Jessica Kingsley Publishers
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Autism is one of the great medical mysteries of our day: Is it caused by genetics, environment, vaccines, or a combination of things? Science as yet can't say, and thus it is also one of the great human tragedies. Millions of people enter the world lacking the tools to cope, with little hope of any immediate cure.

Yet not all of those diagnosed with autism have the severe learning disabilities, physical limitations, or inability to understand social interaction. In recent years much has been learned about the milder Asperger Syndrome, which is characterized by difficulty communicating and interacting with the external world.

To a growing body of literature on AS, add *Asperger Syndrome and Alcohol: Drinking To Cope?* by Matthew Tinsley and Sarah Hendrickx. The book attempts to break new ground on the relationship between alcoholism and persons who have or probably have AS, but haven't necessarily been diagnosed.

Tinsley is not just the co-author; he's a living, breathing laboratory specimen. That he survived until age forty-three before discovering he had the classic AS symptoms is something of a medical mystery in itself. Toward the end, he was consuming up to three large bottles of gin a day. He should have been comatose, or dead.

But he lived to tell his tale, and it's a compelling story, even for others coping merely with alcoholism. Hendrickx provides the clinical overview. She's the training manager on an AS support project in England and the co-author of two earlier AS-related books.

This book intersperses Tinsley's story with commentary by Hendrickx, supplemented by relevant quotes from other, anonymous persons with AS and drinking problems. There's no attempt, or need, to dramatize. Information is compiled and presented without sweeping pronouncements. It is clear, though, that an alcoholic person with AS stands a better chance of

rehabilitation once the AS is diagnosed.

And what is the relationship between the one and the other? To her credit, Hendrickx makes no bold claims. “The possibility that someone can be both alcoholic and autistic needs to be recognized in both autism and substance misuse services, and a greater understanding of both fields established,” she writes.

As for Tinsley, his is a message of hope. “It is *never* too late to change your life if you are unhappy with your addiction and wish to gain self-knowledge,” he says. “From being lost in the depths of addiction and depression, I am now living a life I couldn’t have imagined.”

Dick Cady