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SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND MOTOR FUNCTION IN THE ASPERGER SYNDROME, A HYPOTHESIS

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The precise nature of social impairments in Asperger syndrome is still in need of investigation and is less severe than in autism. Patients with Asperger show impairments in receptive and expressive language, social perception and social skills. Moreover deficits in empathy, motor disturbances and restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities are often observed. An important finding is the association between motor disabilities and the degree of social withdrawal and the severity of autistic symptoms. Major motor control abnormalities are impaired gait, balance, manual dexterity and grip. It is hypothesized that specific deficits reflect impairment in the ability to integrate sensory input with appropriate motor commands and this is consistent with cerebellar dysfunction found in Asperger syndrome. It is important to emphasize that most theories of emotion stress that emotions arise from bodily sensations and are in essence preparations for (motor) action. Recently the importance of cerebellar function for emotional processing was rediscovered after a long time during which the cerebellum was considered to have no function at all in emotion regulation. These considerations might be of importance for further research and treatment. We present a review on this topic and some hypotheses about treatment modalities.