

SPRING 2026

Brain Bites

Maryland Brain Study Newsletter, Volume 8

Upcoming Events

EVERY MONDAY @ 1 PM

Parent Child Journey hosts free, virtual parent support groups, with topics ranging from tech use in neurodivergent kids to person-centered care. Register here:



MAY 20 @ 7 PM

Pathfinders for Autism hosts a virtual Bingo night! Register & see other events here:



MAY 30 @ 10 AM - 1 PM

Autism Society of Maryland and *xMinds* co-host an in-person clinic for Montgomery County families, offering resources for transitions to adulthood for autistic teens.

Learn more & register here:



Lab Updates

- We are **continuing** follow up visits with participants in our **social connection study**.
- We are **piloting a new study** examining how our brains synchronize with others!

Brain Bite!

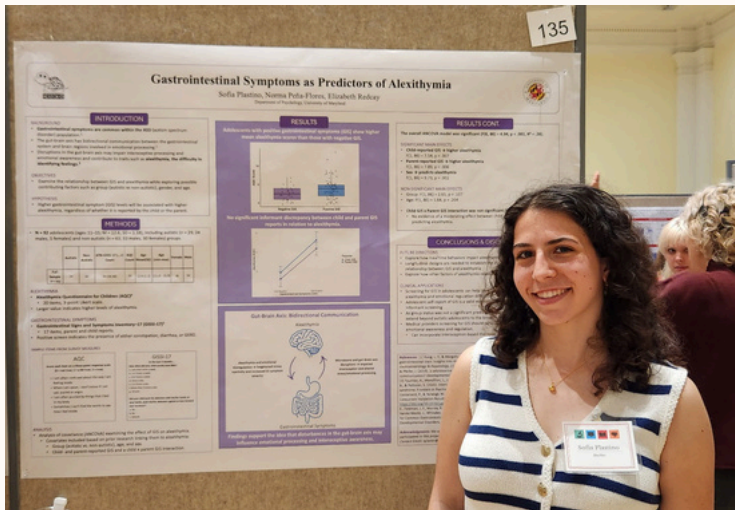


Last month, we watched astronauts fly by the moon on Artemis II. Did you know that six months in space with microgravity can **enlarge** key brain structures?

Research Spotlight

Gastrointestinal Symptoms as Predictors of Alexithymia

by Sofia Plastino

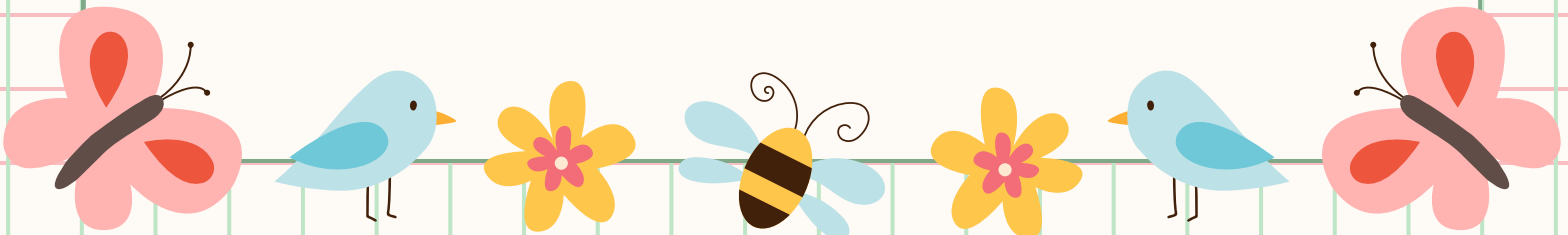


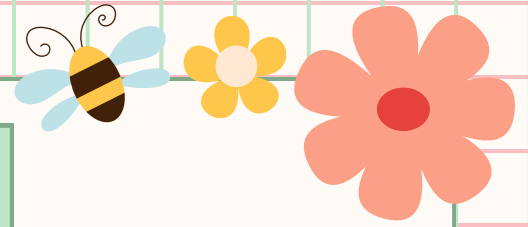
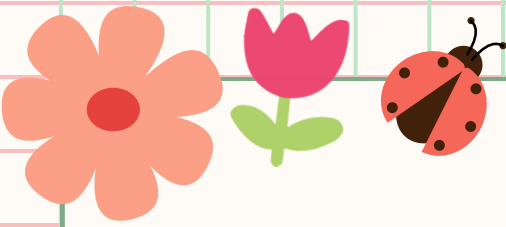
Sofia's research looked at gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms in relation to difficulties identifying feelings (known as alexithymia). She assessed this using survey questionnaires and found that the presence of GI symptoms is associated with more difficulty identifying feelings. This work is preliminary but it is consistent with other work suggesting that gut health may be related to emotion processing. This could be a promising direction for more holistic therapeutic approaches.

Gut Health & Emotional Well-Being

by Norma Peña-Flores

Graduate student Norma Peña-Flores' dissertation studies how gut health shapes emotional well-being in autistic teens, who are often challenged by co-occurring gut issues and mood disorders. Using our study's brain data and surveys, her work aims to help us understand how the gut and brain are connected and how both play an important role in mental health.

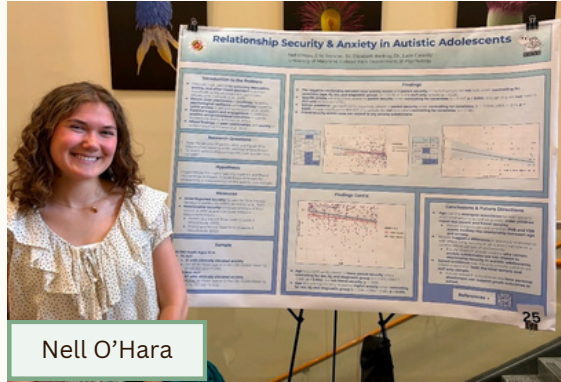




Undergraduate Research Assistant Posters



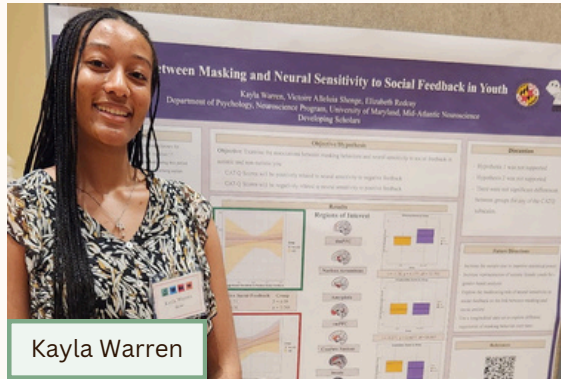
Sophia Ubiera



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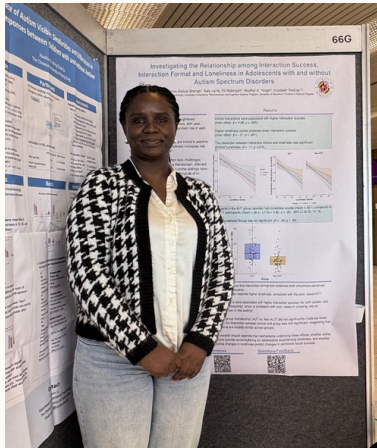


Rachel Resnik



Kayla Warren

& Conferences!



Graduate students Vicky (left) and Erin (right) presented posters at the International Society for Autism Research conference in Prague, Czech Republic.

Lab manager Mia presented a poster at the Social Affective Neuroscience Society's conference in San Diego, CA.

