

Alis thinks  
weightlifting is a great  
sport for women



“I like the fact that my weightlifting is solitary. The most enjoyment comes from being able to do it alone, in my own time, in my own way.”  
— *Alis Rowe*

it, so why not give it a try and see?

After my first few sessions of coaching and learning more about Olympic lifting on the internet, I was hooked. It started from lots of hours and days just learning the basic movement of the snatch using a broomstick! It was a few weeks till I got to use a barbell. I wasn't put off though and I'm really glad I stuck at it.

As well as my power rack, dumbbells and standard men's bar, I also have my own weightlifting platform, jerk blocks, a women's specific Olympic barbell, and a set of Eleiko bumper plates all at home – so I have everything I need. My coaches come to my home, which works well for me.

Olympic lifting is not the sort of sport you can teach yourself and I would recommend anyone who wants to try it to get themselves a good coach. It is a very technical sport and there is no substitute for someone watching you and cuing you in real time.

After five years, I am now pretty good at it and, most importantly, I enjoy it so much it changed my life. I qualified as a personal trainer, although I have not pursued this as

a career, due to my autism. I'm good enough at weightlifting to qualify at the national level but I have no interest in competing, even though my coach has tried to persuade me.

The primary reason is that I do not like to be the centre of attention – ever. I do not even like talking to people because when I am talking I feel like the spotlight is on me. If I competed, I would feel very shy, embarrassed and anxious.

Also, I'm not a competitive person. I like to compete against myself because I like to develop and progress who I am as a person, but I don't like comparing myself to others. In fact, comparison with others has been very damaging to my self-esteem. Growing up undiagnosed with autism meant I was never “as good” as my peers at certain things, and I have often felt inferior and upset.

I like the fact that my weightlifting is solitary. The enjoyment I get comes from being able to do it alone, in my own time, in my own way. I am also sometimes reluctant to train in the way my coach wants me to (if, for example, they want me to stop a certain exercise and focus on another one instead, or if they want me to change my diet –

that's not going to happen!). If I was going to compete, I would have to obey their instructions entirely, which, again, would take away some of the pleasure of lifting for me.

I think it's a great sport for people with ASD, especially females. Not only do they have the autism traits (such as hyper focus, dedication, commitment, the desire to master, and the love of repetition and sameness), but also, physically, females are thought to be better ‘designed’ for lifting than males. We are generally more mobile and more flexible, have strong legs, a lower centre of balance, and may be more patient and willing to listen and take advice!

If you're interested in trying it, my advice is to get a coach who works for you (make sure they understand your autism and explain what you need from them and what your limitations are). Read about it and watch lots of videos! Practice and have patience. Weightlifting is a frustrating and very difficult sport. There will be lots of ‘bad days’, but with consistency and commitment, all the work pays off and you can be amazing at it. It's a very impressive and addictive thing to get into! ●



## → Find out more

- Find out more about Olympic weightlifting in the UK at [britishweightlifting.org](http://britishweightlifting.org).
- We offer autism training for sports coaches and physical activity leaders. Find out more at [www.autism.org.uk/active](http://www.autism.org.uk/active).
- Find autism-friendly sports clubs near you at [www.theautismdirectory.com](http://www.theautismdirectory.com) and at [www.autism.org.uk/directory](http://www.autism.org.uk/directory).