

BURNOUT AND FATIGUE



ASD Service

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NHS
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In 2019, ‘burnout’ was recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as an ‘occupational phenomenon’.



What is burnout?



- **Burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. It can occur when you experience long-term stress in your job, or when you have worked in a physically or emotionally draining role for a long time.**



- **Common signs of burnout:**
 - Feeling tired or drained most of the time
 - Feeling helpless, trapped and/or defeated
 - Feeling detached/alone in the world
 - Having a cynical/negative outlook
 - Self-doubt
 - Procrastinating and taking longer to get things done
 - Feeling overwhelmed

While someone with occupational burnout will feel chronically stressed due to the pressures of their work,



someone with *autistic burnout* will feel chronically stressed due to the pressures of living and working in a neurotypical world, life stress, and coping with social and sensory stressors.

Fatigue, and subsequent burnout, can happen to anybody.

Autistic people, however, can be more susceptible to both, due to the pressures of everyday life, having to navigate social situations and sensory overload.

Trying to cope with these pressures can lead to exhaustion (autistic fatigue) and over time this can lead to extreme exhaustion or autistic burnout.

Autistic people have described various ways that autistic fatigue and burnout have affected them. Autistic fatigue has often been described as exhaustion with additional difficulties such as:

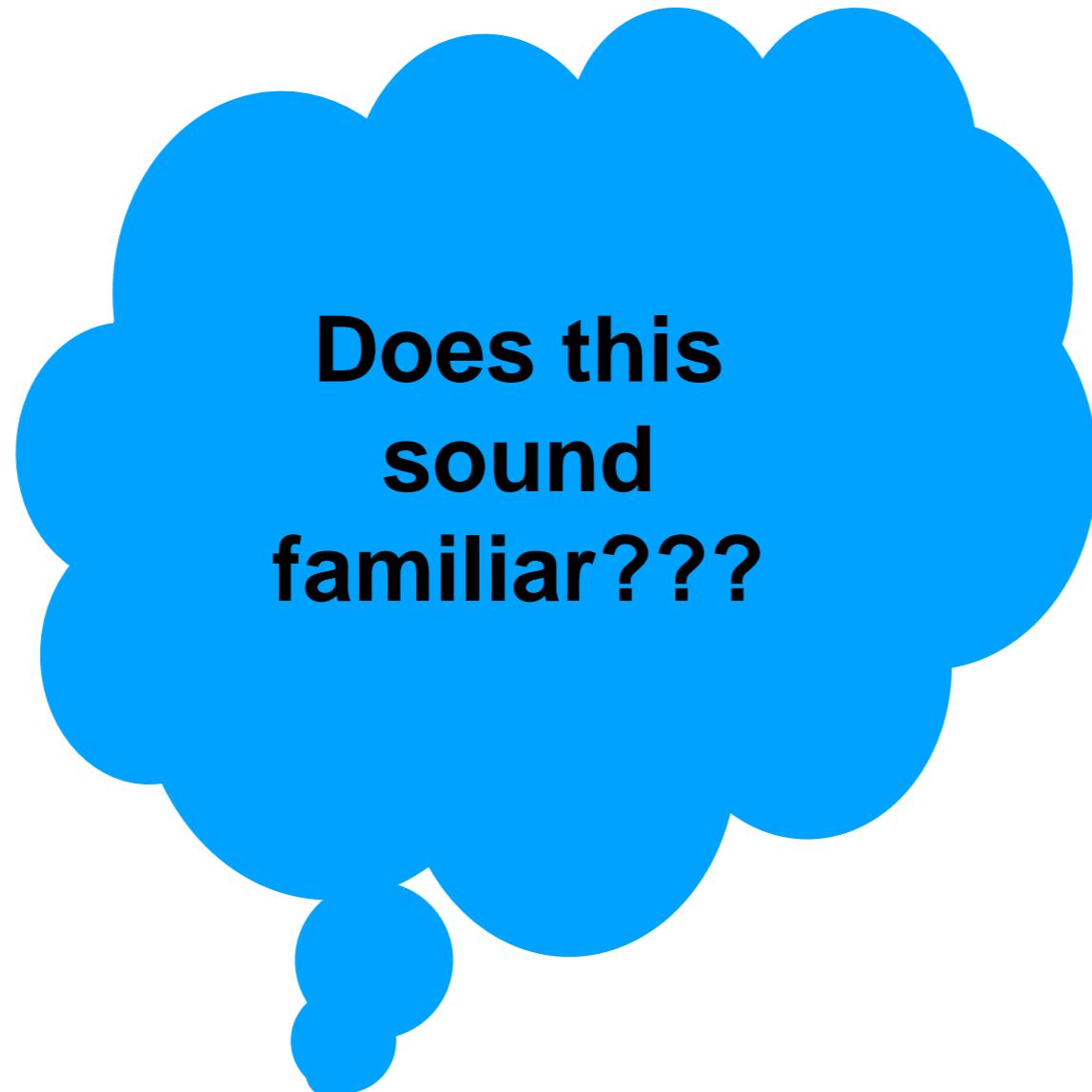
increased meltdowns
and sensory
sensitivity

physical pain and
headaches

Autistic burnout affects all aspects of a person's life, and this makes it different from professional burnout, which is related to work.

physically shutting down, including the loss of speech.





**Does this
sound
familiar???**

What causes autistic fatigue and burnout?

AUTISTIC BURNOUT

TRYING TOO MANY THINGS AT THE SAME TIME

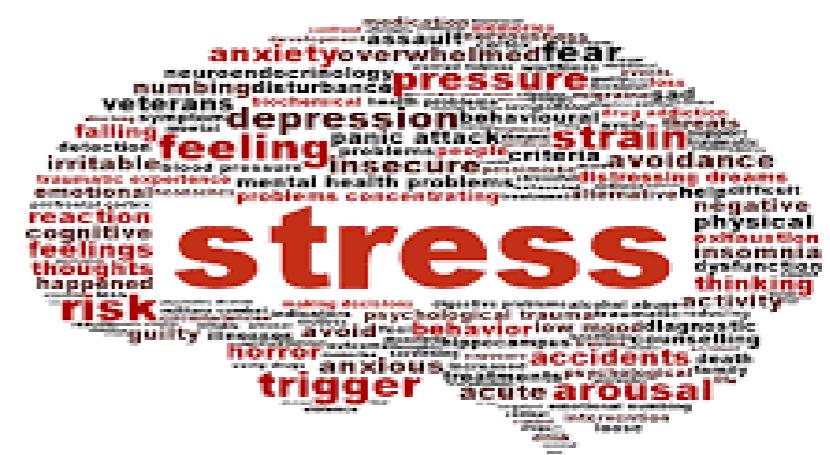


- Too Much Stress and Not Enough Help

Too much stress?

Here are just few of the causes of stress for autistic people:

- Masking
- Sensory Sensitivities and Unmet Sensory Needs
- Executive Functioning Difficulties
- Coping with Change
 - Life Event
 - Daily Hassle





what are the barriers?

- Not enough understanding from others
- Not enough support with sensory needs
- Not enough emotional and practical support
- Gaslighting/denial
- Shame



**What does
Autistic fatigue
or burnout look
or feel like???**

Signs of autistic burnout



nonchalance/
flat mood



low attention span



exhaustion



scared to make
commitments



irritability



overwhelmed & /
or underwhelmed



special interests
unappealing



low capacity
for socialising



unshakeable and
constant anxiety

@adulting_with_autism_

(Autistic burnout checklist on slide 19 below)

Autistic burnout is a natural reaction to living in a world which does not automatically take account of different needs. It is not the fault of the autistic person. Autistic people need employers, families, friends and society to understand that they have a different set of needs.



- You can recover from burnout by understanding your own personal stress triggers, how to lower your stress levels and adapt your life so that your needs are met. Sometimes you might need help to get other people and/ or organisations to make reasonable adjustments for you. You might also need to let go of some high and/or neurotypical standards which may maintain your burnout. This process can be difficult and may trigger feelings of shame.



What can I do??

What can I do if I'm experiencing autistic fatigue and burnout?

Gauge how you are feeling now, so that you can recognize changes, and plan. You may find a rating scale useful. (see slide 20 below)

Self knowledge, Identify your own sources of stress, (see slide 21 for list of common causes)

Reduce stress, A list of your stressors may help you to understand what needs to change,(ideas on slides 22 and 23)

Take a break when you can, rest and relaxation.

Can you take a break from “life”? (see slide 24)

What can I do if I'm experiencing autistic fatigue and burnout?

Take time be “*be autistic*”, engage with interests, stim, *unmask* (see slide 25)

Be open with family and friends, use your support network

Develop your resources, ie activity which replenishes your energy, make a reminder list of these

Self advocacy, learn how to set healthy boundaries, and expectations from others, and what to do if they are not respected.

What can I do if I'm experiencing autistic fatigue and burnout?

Lead as healthy a lifestyle as possible, nutrition, sleep, exercise, activity, social contact,

Balance

Acceptance and support, engage with others who accept you as you are without the need for masking

Don't feel guilty or ashamed, just because others don't struggle with things as you do, you are no less of a person.

Spoons???
(**Christine Miserandino**)
Energy accounting
(see slide 26 and 27)



Any questions?

The following slides have more detailed information with regard to todays discussions, as well as some resource links.



Fatigue Checklist

Feeling physically exhausted (not due to illness)
Feeling as if all your internal resources have been used up
Feeling depleted
Needing to sleep more
Finding it hard to get out of bed in the morning
Difficulty with changes in routine
Struggling to plan your day
Finding it hard to start planned activities
Losing focus easily
Difficulty switching between tasks
Finding it hard to make decisions
Feeling mentally exhausted
Slowed down thinking
Finding it hard to think
Decreased ability to solve problems
Finding it hard to find the right words
Memory problems

Needing longer than usual to understand spoken language
Loss or deterioration of work-based skills
Difficulty or discomfort when trying to socialise
Difficulty or discomfort when trying to communicate
Avoiding social situations
Talking to people feels like too much effort
Difficulty thinking of how to respond when people talk to me
Difficulty selecting the 'right' facial expression when interacting
Discomfort associated with eye contact
Not knowing how and when to make eye contact
Difficulty managing emotions
Easily overwhelmed by my emotions
Mood swings
Increased number of meltdowns or shutdowns
Increased intensity of meltdowns or shutdowns
Feeling at increased risk of having meltdowns or shutdowns
Engaging in more stimming (sensory input seeking behaviour)
Finding it hard to suppress stimming
Being bothered by everyday noises
Finding everyday sensations difficult to tolerate
Finding everyday smells difficult to tolerate
Finding everyday sights difficult to tolerate
Finding certain foods difficult to tolerate

How do you feel?

An example scale.



Common Causes of Stress for Autistic People

- Whats app or messenger groups regularly notifying you of messages
- The pressure to respond to calls, emails, texts
- Masking – trying to appear neurotypical in your social interactions
- Masking- suppressing stimulations seeking behaviour
- The need to make small talk at the school gate, office, college or university
- Unmet sensory needs
- Overstimulation
- Aversive sensory stimulation (e.g. lighting, clothing, background noise)
- Unrealistic workload at work/ education/ home
- Working late pushes back evening routine
- Not enough time to do meal preparations so eating nothing or takeaways
- Changes in routine
- Unpredictable events
- Digestive problems
- Health problems
- Difficulty concentrating at work /college due to sensory or social demands
- Friends / Partner / Family wanting to talk or connect when you are too tired/ overwhelmed
- Social events that you are thinking about attending or have committed to attending
- Life events such as having a baby, the death of a loved one, getting married or divorced
- Having to remember to do something
- Daily hassles such as the car breaking down or not being able to get your favorite breakfast cereal
- Money
- Relationship problems



If you list things that are causing you stress, you will start to get an idea of what you need to change in your life.

Once you have your list, go through each item and work out how you could remove or reduce this stressor in the short, medium and/or long term.



Are any of the stressors easy to remove? It might help to look for the easy(ier) short term wins first. For example, you may be able reduce some sensory stressors by wearing ear plugs, cutting labels out of clothing or wearing sunglasses. There may be a relatively easy way of getting out of some of the social events you are feeling too tired to commit to. Take those easy wins first.

You might be feeling overwhelmed by lots of little jobs that are on your to-do list. Maybe some of these jobs could be put on hold, maybe some of them don't really need doing. Ask yourself what would happen if you didn't do those things? How bad would it be? This isn't the time for perfectionism. Some things you might do in an ideal world but aren't actually essential. For example, cooking from scratch, ironing and fixing non essential items.

For the ones that must be done it might help to write in your diary/ schedule on your calendar when you will do them.

Short, medium and long term

- **Short Term Stress Reduction Ideas:**

- Cancelling or postponing any plans that are not time critical
- Asking for extensions on deadlines
- Lowering standards regarding cooking- e.g. buying ready meals or recipe boxes
- Lowering standards regarding cleaning or outsourcing it
- Buying ear defenders/ earplugs/ noise reduction headphones
- Getting rid of or changing lighting that is bothering you
- Take a break from social media or group chats
- Decreasing your stress in the short term will hopefully give you some space to reflect back to your list of stressors, what are the things that are more difficult to fix? What are the things that you don't understand what you need to do to finish a job. At home you may be able to know there are changes you could make to your environment that would help but you may

- **Medium term stress reduction examples:**

- Asking for reduced hours or responsibilities at work
- Asking to be moved to a less stressful job
- Finding a different job
- Developing a less stressful routine around housework
- Getting a sensory integration assessment and sensory diet designed to meet your sensory needs
- Re-negotiating or stepping down from responsibilities, at home, work, in voluntary or social roles
- Finding safe people, spaces and places where you feel less pressure to 'mask' and are able to engage in stimulation seeking behaviours as required.
- Medium term stress reduction techniques start to build a more sustainable life for you and will hopefully help you to continue to recover from burnout. As you recover you might find that you need to make more significant changes in your life.

- **Long Term Stress Reduction Examples:**

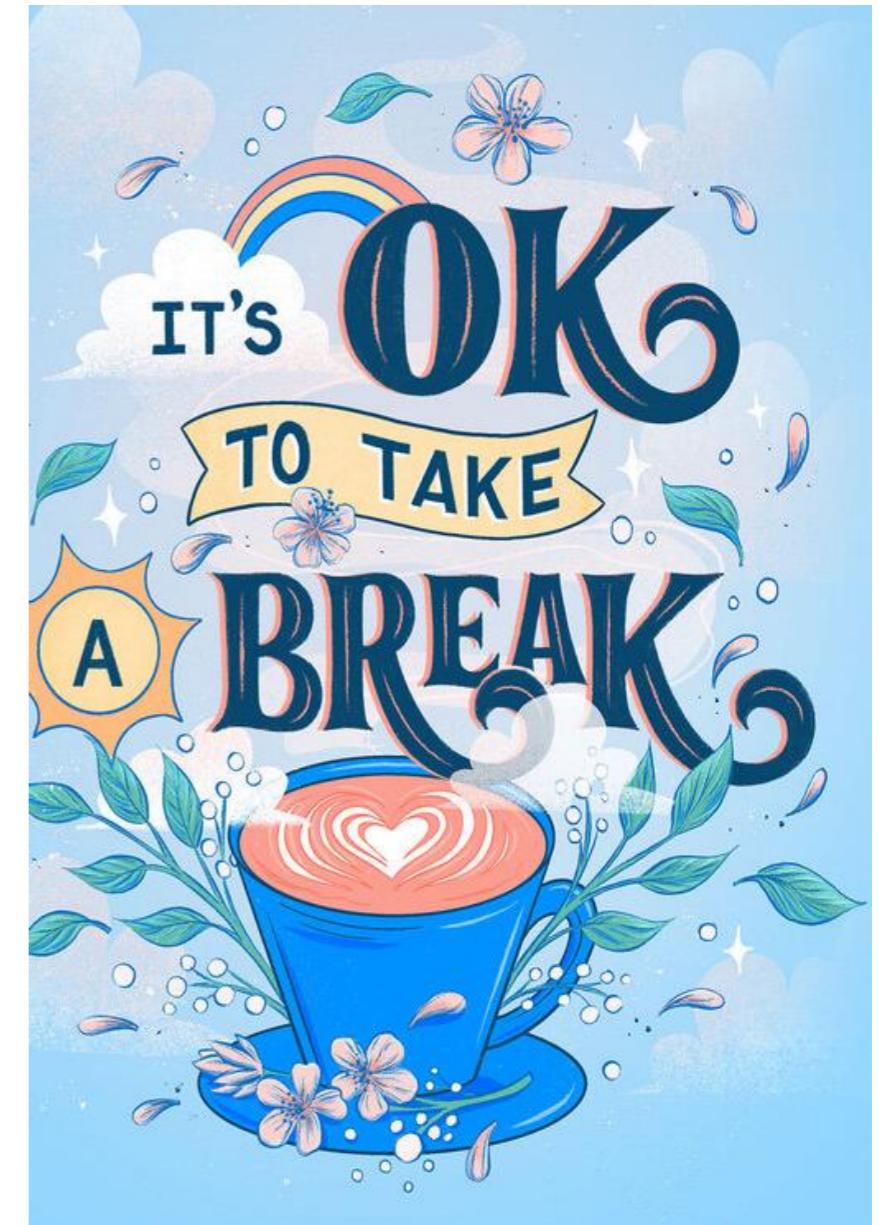
- Decreasing contact with people with whom you feel you need to mask
- Developing confidence around expressing your needs for reasonable adjustments
- Prioritising friendships/ relationships where you feel safe and able to be your authentic self
- Engaging regularly with your special interests
- Making a sensory diet part of your daily routine
- Having a daily routine which is sustainable and allows space for unforeseen events



Possible Ways of Taking a Break:

- Taking time off work/ education as sick
- Booking annual leave from work as soon as possible
- Asking to temporarily reduce your working hours (your GP may provide you with a certificate to say you need reduced hours)
- Asking for extensions on deadlines at work/ education
- Doing the bare minimum at work/in education/ at home
- Avoiding overtime or extra shifts/ projects
- Getting a cleaner or a childminder
- Asking your housemates/ partner/ family for time off from your usual responsibilities
- Going somewhere peaceful for your lunch break
- Leaving work on time
- Booking in a few hours each day/ week/ month where you have no demands on you at all.

- Often, burnt out people prioritise staying at work and cutting back on activities that bring them joy. While this might seem logical, it is counterproductive as people often end up having lower mood and energy from the lack of positive activity in their lives.
- If you have energy left then make sure you prioritise activities that bring you pleasure and give you a sense of achievement as this will help boost your mood.



What is masking?



This can lead to autistic burnout

Other info:

The Spoon Theory
by Christine Miserandino
www.butyoudontlooksick.com



Apps, for example, (many more available, some may incur a charge)
SpoonieDay
Healthily
Mindshift

Energy/emotional accounting

A system used to set manageable limits on your energy levels so you do not deplete yourself to the point of burnout.

Set a limit on how much energy you have in a day or week and estimate how much certain activities drain them. Also work out how much certain activities energise them.

You can then try to plan and balance activities and energy over a day or week to try and manage stress limits. Make sure you build in time for relaxation and recovery.

Time off and rest/relaxation

Whether you use energy accounting or not, time off from work or school and other high-stress activities is key to managing stress levels. Ensuring time for activities/interests that re-energise and promote relaxation is key. This could be connecting with family and friends or enjoying hobbies or interests.

EMOTIONAL ACCOUNTING

@NewgladeCounsell

Withdrawals
What drains your energy? (0-100)

Deposits
What gives you energy? (0-100)