

# Neurodivergence & Exhaustion

This factsheet is for neurodivergent adults, parents & carers and professionals who would like to know more about why neurodivergent people feel exhausted, and how to address burnout.

## Introduction

We all get tired at times, but neurodivergent (ND) people can be particularly susceptible to exhaustion and burnout. This can leave them unable to cope with even basic tasks or functions, such as speech, in very bad cases. Exhaustion can leave neurodivergent people unable to continue with their normal life for a period, and cause them physical pain and great emotional distress.

## Why do neurodivergent people feel exhaustion?



### Reason 1: 'Masking'

Being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world is often exhausting. This is because many neurodivergent people 'mask' which is when they attempt to camouflage their ND traits by 'acting' like neurotypical people in order to fit in. Rather than being their true selves, they often feel the need to take on a different role - similar to acting on stage - to deflect from people noticing their difference.



### Reason 2: Sensory overload

Neurodivergent people are also often hypersensitive in one or more senses. For example, some neurodivergent people don't like travelling on the tube in London - it's often crowded, noisy, claustrophobic and hot in the summer. The stress of dealing with these extra inputs can lead them to feel overwhelmed and cause exhaustion and burnout.



## What happens if exhaustion isn't caught early?

When exhaustion reaches a certain level, the ND person affected may simply be unable to carry on with much, if anything at all. They need to recover in much the same way as an athlete that has just completed a strenuous race or a performer who has just given a concert.

## What is the best way to address exhaustion & burnout?

The best strategy for addressing exhaustion and burnout is to try and prevent them from occurring in the first place. Many ND people know well which situations they will find difficult and tiring, and should be allowed and encouraged to manage their exposure to these situations and offering support will be welcomed. Energy accounting can be used to assess how much can be achieved in a day, and allocating time when ND people can be their true selves on a regular basis is invaluable.