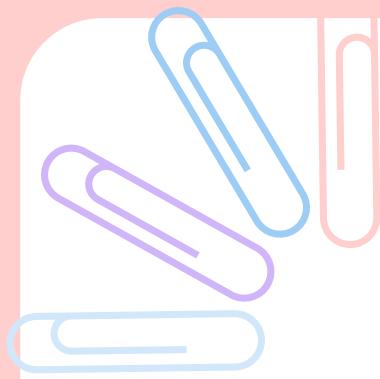


MANAGING ENERGY and NEURODIVERGENCE



A self-help workbook from
ndhelp.co.uk 



Contents

About	3
Defining Energy	4
Energy Differences	5–6
Exploring Beliefs	7–8
Management Systems	9–13
Dropping Demands	14
Resources	15–16

About

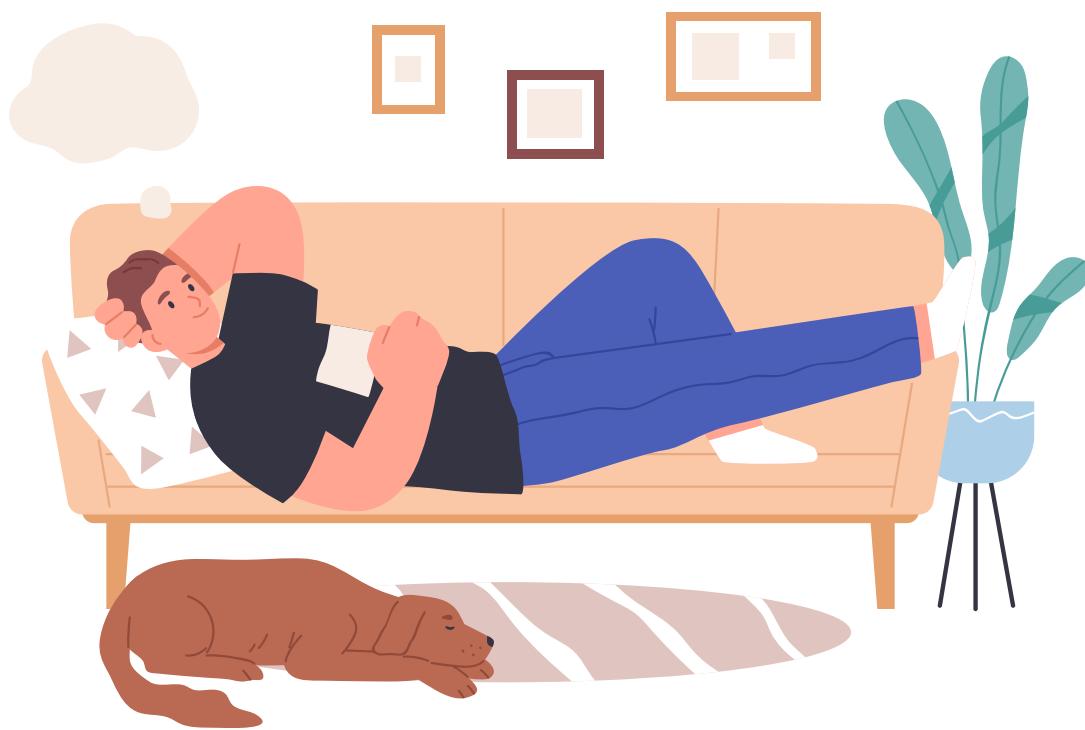
As neurodivergent people, we can experience higher levels of **stress**, **burnout** and **fatigue**. This workbook will help you explore some ways to notice and manage your **energy**.

What do we mean by energy?

Energy is the fuel our brain and body use to do things. Like the charge in a battery, energy can go up and down.

Different activities affect energy

Some things drain us and some things restore us. When we talk about energy and rest, we don't just mean sleeping. We also mean what recharges our energy throughout the day.



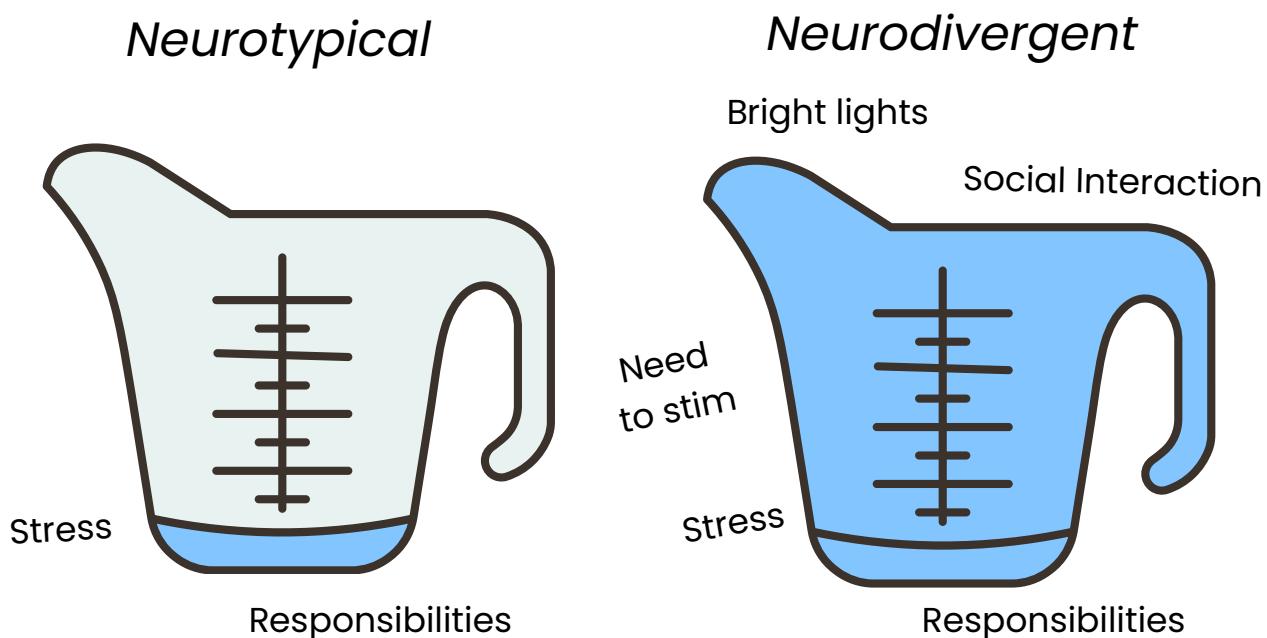
Difference not deficit

Often, the things that make us tired can be a bit different from what tires other people, and we might get tired more quickly. On the other hand, we might get energy from things that leave others drained! These are differences to be accepted, not something to be fixed.

Energy Differences

For all kinds of brains, rest and relaxation are really important for functioning. This is especially true for neurodivergent people, because our brains often have to work harder just to get through the day.

The 'Stress Jug' Analogy



Think of energy like water filling up a jug. Here's how the same situation might fill the jug of a neurotypical person compared to a neurodivergent person.

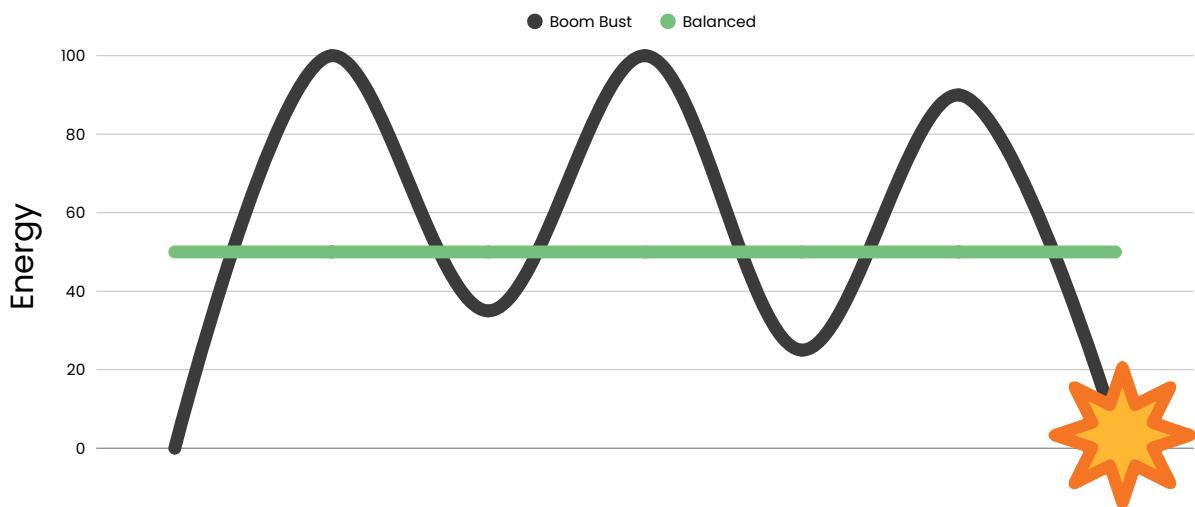
*This is just an example and doesn't account for the individual differences in everyone's experience, but hopefully it illustrates the point that we can expend more energy than we realise to compensate for our different needs.

Boom and Bust

If our energy levels change a lot, we might feel like doing as much as possible on days when we have lots of energy ('**Boom**').

Cycle of Burnout

The problem is, if we do too much and ignore our body's signals to rest, we can end up feeling exhausted with less energy ('**Bust**'). This can happen over a day, a week, or even longer.



Breaking the cycle

If this keeps happening, we can become trapped in a **cycle of burnout** leading to frustration and shame. But thankfully once we notice this cycle, we can learn how to break it by paying attention to what drains our energy and what refills it using **energy accounting**. We can also learn to **pace** ourselves.

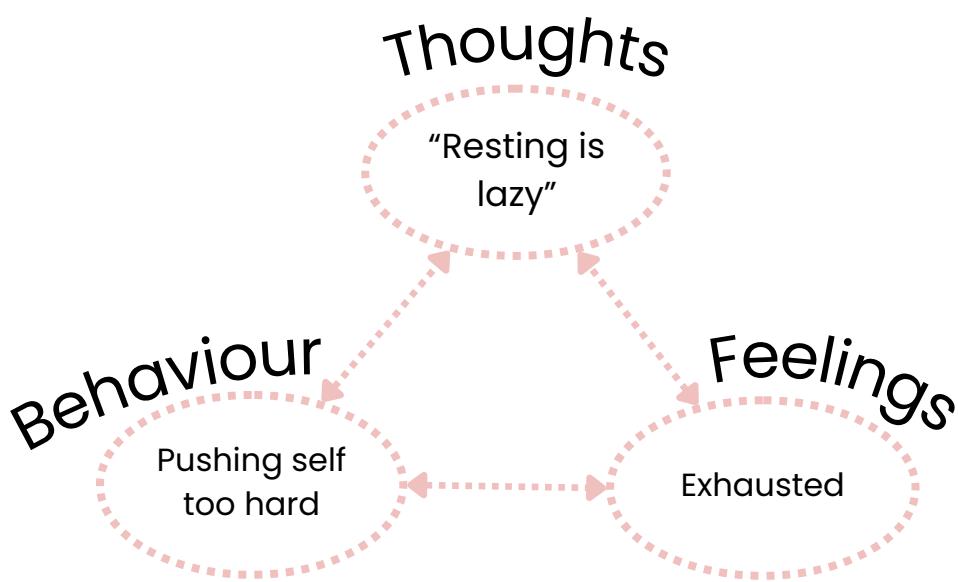
Beliefs around rest

Sometimes we develop **beliefs about rest** from messages around us. Many of us can start believing 'rest is lazy', and that can make it really hard to rest, even when we truly need it.

“
Resting is
lazy
”

“
I should always
be busy
”

“
I have to
earn rest
”



Do you have any unhelpful beliefs around rest? Try to rate 0 to 100% for how strongly you believe this is true.

Exploring Beliefs

The way we think about rest can change how we treat ourselves. Therefore, gently exploring our beliefs about rest can help us understand why it's hard to put our needs first.

Developing healthier beliefs

Once you've identified an unhelpful belief about resting, we can gently explore whether these beliefs reduce suffering and enrich our lives in the present.

Belief to be challenged

“

”

Evidence for (Where could this belief come from?)

In CBT, a common tool for examining beliefs is to explore the evidence supporting them — why we believe what we do.

.....

.....

.....

Evidence against

We then explore evidence against our belief. It is important to keep in mind the goal is not to get rid of the belief but develop a more balanced one.

.....

.....

.....

Questions to ask ourselves

- What experiences do I have that show that this belief is not completely true all the time?
- When did this belief protect me in the past?
- Would I say the same thing to a close friend or family member?
- Is this my belief, or is it someone else's that I have internalised?
- If this is an old belief, is it still in line with my values now?
- Has this belief actually helped me in the long-term?

Levels of Fatigue

Feeling tired is different for everyone, and it can affect our body and mind in lots of ways. For people with long-term health conditions, disabilities, or who are neurodivergent, it's not just 'feeling tired.' It can show up in many ways. Use the below chart to think about different levels of fatigue and what they feel like for you.

Low Fatigue	Moderate Fatigue	High Fatigue
E.g. fidgeting, losing concentration	E.g. yawning, finding it more difficult to speak	E.g. feeling exhausted, headaches or migraines

Checking in: If you're unsure how you're feeling, you can try scheduling 'check-ins' during the day. Pause and ask yourself:

- How does my body feel? (e.g., tired, relaxed)
- What emotions am I feeling? (e.g., calm, stressed)
- What have I been doing? (e.g., working, resting)

Writing your answers in a journal can help you notice your energy levels and recognise when to rest or slow down. It's a simple way to care for yourself.

Energy Accounting

Some activities drain our energy, while others help us recharge. Below are some examples, and space for you to reflect on what uses and restores your energy.

Energy Drains	Energy Gains
E.g. Getting the bus Brushing my teeth Meetings at work	E.g. Sitting in a quiet room Reading about my special interest Spending time with a safe person

Meaningful activities can be draining too

Things that use up our energy aren't always bad! Sometimes the things we really enjoy doing can take a lot out of us. The key is to notice it and **balance** your energy. For example, Laura loves seeing her friends but finds this tiring, so often needs time to rest afterward.

Battery Theory

Energy Systems

It can help to track our energy using an energy system. There are a few different ones people use, like 'Spoon Theory,' but we're going to use batteries instead for those of us who think more literally.



Battery Theory

Battery theory works like this: we all start the day with a certain number of 'batteries' that show how much energy we have.

On a good day, we might wake up fully charged with, for example, 10 batteries. On a bad day when we haven't slept well or used a lot of energy the last day, we might only wake up with 5 batteries.



Everyone is different

Every activity uses a different amount of energy (or number of batteries) for each person. For example, if two friends meet, this might drain a single battery for one person and two batteries for the other person.

Battery Tracker

Use this planner to think of activities that drain and restore your energy. At this stage, we are just exploring our energy, but you may find it helpful to start **pacing** and storing batteries for the next day.

Activity

Eg. Getting the bus

Batteries



E.g. Spending time alone



Tracker

Now it's time to track your energy over several days. How much energy are you using? Are you pacing yourself?

In the morning: How many batteries did you wake up with today?



Activity	Battery Usage (+ or -)

In the evening: how do you feel at the end of the day?

Reducing demands

When recovering from burnout, prioritizing our **needs** is key. For some, this means extended rest and reducing demands. Identifying what's essential for you and temporarily letting go of non-urgent tasks can create space for recovery and restoration.

Essential responsibilities

Eg, preparing meals, childcare

Non-essential responsibilities

Eg, Volunteering, social events

Lightening the Load

- **Share tasks:** Ask others to help (e.g. with cooking or childcare).
- **Support your senses:** Use equipment like noise-cancelling headphones (see our 'Sensory Soothing' workbook for more ideas)
- If possible, **add relaxation:** E.g. listen to something soothing like music or a podcast while doing chores.

'Saying No'

- **Set boundaries:** Say no to anything that isn't truly necessary.
 - E.g. skip extra work or social plans.
- **Remind self of values:** Why is rest meaningful?
- **Focus on recovery:** Choose good food, special interests, and things that help you feel like you.

When the Body Says No



It can be difficult to express our needs and prioritise them around other people. Having a boundary statement prepared like 'No thank you, I need to rest' can be useful at times. Remember there is an important cost to ignoring our needs. If we don't learn to say no, eventually our body will say no for us.

Planner

Record activities below.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00 - 10:00							
10:00-13:00							
13:00 - 16:00							
16:00 - 19:00							
19:00 - 21:00							
21:00 - 00:00							

Notes

Sources

Fenn K, Byrne M. The key principles of cognitive behavioural therapy. InnovAiT. 2013;6(9):579-585. doi:10.1177/1755738012471029

Miserandino, Christine (2003). "The Spoon Theory". But You Don't Look Sick. Archived from the original on 17 November 2019. Retrieved 31/07/2025

National Autistic Society. (31.07.25.). National Autistic Society. <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Website, N. (31.07.25.). What is autism? nhs.uk. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/>

Found this helpful?

For more free evidence-based workbooks, visit
ndhelp.co.uk

Remember: your needs are, and always have been, valid.