



FREE GUIDE

ADHD & Burnout

Understanding, Preventing & Healing from Burnout

A practical guide for neurodivergent individuals, caregivers, and the people who support them.

SECTION 1

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. It's not just "feeling tired" or overwhelmed—it's a deeper, more sustained depletion that can affect every part of your life. For neurodivergent individuals, burnout often looks and feels different compared to neurotypical experiences.

"A state of physical and mental fatigue, heightened stress, and diminished capacity to manage life skills, sensory input, and/or social interactions." — Dora M. Raymaker, researcher

In neurodivergent individuals, this often results from years (or decades) of strain caused by societal expectations that don't align with their needs or natural rhythms.

Key Differences: Neurodivergent vs. Neurotypical Burnout

Neurodivergent Burnout

Results from chronic stress caused by trying to function in systems designed for neurotypical brains. Affects the autonomic nervous system, leading to emotional dysregulation and cognitive overload.

Neurotypical Burnout

Typically tied to work overload or life stress. While serious, it does not carry the same layer of identity suppression, sensory overwhelm, or decades of masking that compound neurodivergent burnout.

The Root Causes of ADHD Burnout

Early Foundations: The Childhood Experience

For many ADHD individuals, the seeds of burnout are planted early in life. Girls with ADHD are particularly vulnerable, as they are often:

Instructed to suppress emotions

Instead of processing feelings, they're taught to "hold it together" at all costs, leading to emotional disconnection over time.

Encouraged to mask

From a young age, girls with ADHD learn to hide their neurodivergent traits and conform to neurotypical expectations—often through perfectionism, people-pleasing, and hyper-productivity.

⚠️ These behaviors are survival mechanisms, but come at a steep cost. Over time, they lay the foundation for burnout as these girls grow into women who feel they must perform at unsustainable levels to "fit in."

The Role of Masking

Masking involves hiding or suppressing one's neurodivergent traits to conform to societal norms. It might include suppressing stims, changing speech patterns, or forcing oneself to engage socially when it feels draining. Masking causes burnout through:

What Masking Costs You

- **Cognitive fatigue** from constantly monitoring behavior
- **Loss of identity** as the "real you" becomes buried
- **Emotional exhaustion** from unaligned expectations

What Acceptance Gives Back

- **Self-determination**
- **Reduced stress**
- Greater empowerment and resilience

SECTION 3

Recognising the Signs of Burnout

Recognising burnout early is key to addressing it before it deepens. Look out for these signs in yourself or someone you care for:

Meltdowns

Intense emotional reactions triggered by overwhelm—often disproportionate to the immediate situation.

Increased Reactivity

Heightened sensitivity to sensory or emotional inputs that previously felt manageable.

Regression

Difficulty managing tasks or skills that were previously manageable—a key signal of depletion.

Sympathetic State Activation

Constant fight-or-flight responses, leaving the body and mind in a persistent state of hyperarousal.

For ADHD Adults Specifically:

Exhaustion

Fatigue that doesn't go away with rest

Amplified ADHD

Forgetfulness, impulsivity, or emotional dysregulation worsen

Sensory Overload

Sensitivities that feel overwhelming or unbearable

Withdrawal

Pulling back from social interactions or responsibilities

Types of Burnout in Adults

Burnout can show up at the end of a long day, after a grueling week or month, or as a persistent long-term issue. Understanding the type you're experiencing helps guide the right response.

1. Short-Term (Acute) Burnout

Causes: Intense mental or sensory exertion over a short period.

Symptoms: Fatigue, emotional dysregulation, or even temporary shutdowns.

Management: Immediate rest, sensory breaks, and comforting routines.

2. Long-Term Burnout

Causes: Chronic stress, prolonged masking, or insufficient recovery over months or years.

Symptoms: Persistent fatigue, chronic anxiety or depression, and diminished capacity to manage daily life.

Management: A combination of therapy, lifestyle adjustments, and building supportive communities.

📘 Burnout vs. Depression: Although they share symptoms like fatigue and withdrawal, their management differs. Rest and recovery are essential for burnout, while behavioral activation may help depression but can *worsen* burnout. If you're unsure which you're experiencing, speak with a professional.

Preventing Burnout

Whether you're a neurodivergent adult managing your own wellbeing, or a caregiver supporting a child, these strategies build resilience before burnout takes hold.

1 Prioritise Rest and Recovery

Sensory rest: Create quiet spaces, use noise-canceling headphones, or take sensory breaks.

Emotional rest: Provide opportunities for safe emotional expression.

Physical rest: Prioritise sleep, naps, and relaxation.

2 Lower Expectations and Pressures

Reduce academic or social demands that exceed the individual's capacity. Offer flexibility in routines and participation to allow for recovery and balance.

3 Create Environmental Accommodations

Design **sensory-friendly spaces** that minimise overwhelm. Use **visual schedules** or tools to create predictability and reduce anxiety. Limit exposure to known triggers or overstimulating situations.

4 Support Co-Regulation

Caregivers can model calm emotional regulation during stressful situations, providing emotional safety and teaching effective regulation skills.

5 Promote Acceptance

Acceptance helps reduce the pressure to mask and boosts self-esteem, providing a foundation for long-term resilience.

Healing from Burnout

Recovery is possible—but it takes time, intention, and the right support. Here are the key steps to begin healing:

1 Embrace Stimming

Stimming helps regulate the nervous system and should be celebrated as a natural, healing behaviour—not suppressed.

2 Rest Extensively

Reduce non-essential demands and allow your body and mind the time they need to heal. This is not laziness—it is medicine.

3 Build a Support Network

Connect with neurodivergent peers who can relate to your experience and offer encouragement without judgment.

4 Engage in Joyful Activities

Rediscover special interests or hobbies that bring you happiness and replenish your energy.

5 Reflect on Triggers

Understand what led to your burnout to better manage stress in the future and prevent recurrence.

6 Advocate for Accommodations

Whether at work or in school, requesting tailored accommodations can significantly reduce stress and support lasting recovery.

You Are Not Alone

Burnout is a serious condition, particularly for neurodivergent individuals. It's not a failure—it's a sign that your environment and demands need adjusting.

Rest

Give yourself permission to stop and recover

Acceptance

Honour your neurodivergent needs without shame

Connection

Seek community and support from those who understand

Advocacy

Request accommodations and adjustments that serve you

If you see yourself in these signs, take the first step toward healing. Seek support, prioritise yourself, and remember: **you're not alone on this journey.**

This guide is part of the **Flourish: ADHD** programme · Learn more at flourishadhd.com