

Supporting **AUTISTIC GIRLS AND WOMEN**

Series



An evidence-based workbook on
understanding and supporting
burnout in autistic mothers

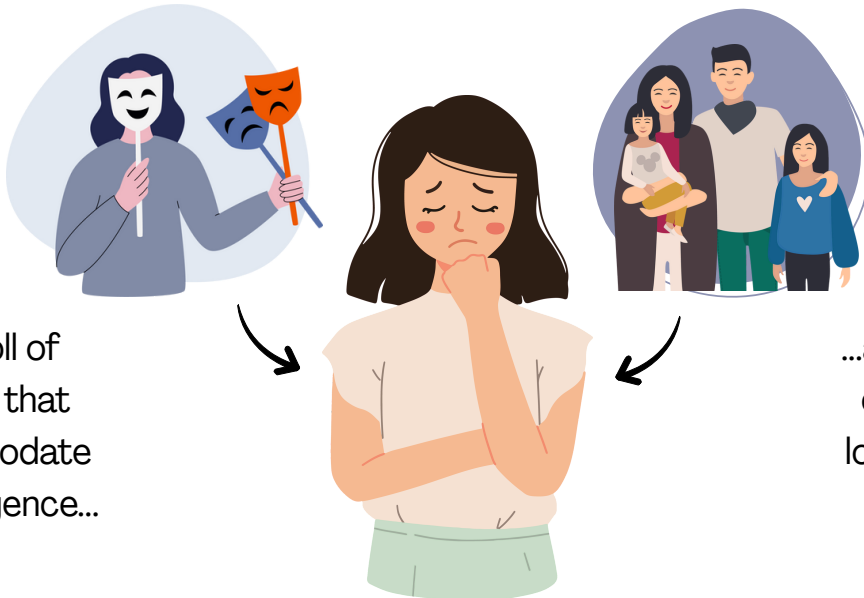
What is burnout in autistic mothers?



Burnout in autistic mothers is a compounded form of exhaustion—where the demands of parenting intersect with the chronic strain of masking, sensory overload, and navigating inaccessible systems. It's not just tiredness; it's a full-body shutdown that can affect speech, cognition, and emotional regulation.

Burnout intensifies over time. Some mothers reported that they could manage better when younger, but as they reached middle age (especially around menopause), their ability to mask and cope diminished, leading to more acute burnout (Gore et al., 2024).

Autistic mothers often face **dual pressures**:



The internal toll of living in a world that doesn't accommodate their neurodivergence...

...and the intense emotional and logistical load of caregiving

Carer burnout is the emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion from prolonged caregiving responsibilities, often without adequate support or rest, where the demands of caregiving exceed the carer's personal coping resources (Sekułowicz et al., 2022).

Autistic burnout is a state of extreme exhaustion, social withdrawal, and heightened autistic traits. It is more than just tiredness, often leaving mothers unable to function as they usually would (Sekułowicz et al., 2022; Pearson et al., 2024). It can be severely debilitating, and is primarily linked to the chronic stress of living in an unaccommodating neurotypical world. This includes the ongoing demands of masking or camouflaging autistic traits, coping with overwhelming sensory and social environments, and managing cognitive overload (Higgins et al., 2021).





Key causes and contributing factors

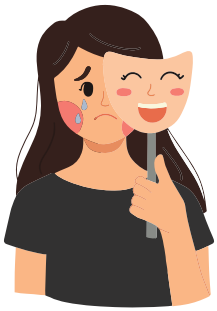
There are a number of causes and factors identified in the research that contribute to burnout in autistic mothers, including:

• The amplified demands of motherhood

- Autistic mothers often carry the primary responsibility for childcare, household management, and sometimes additional caring roles
- Many also juggle employment or study, with little external support
- The constant demands, lack of downtime, and unpredictability of motherhood leads to a "constant decline" in functioning



• Societal expectations and masking



- There is significant pressure to conform to neuronormative and ableist standards of motherhood, leading to masking (suppressing autistic traits to meet societal expectations of "good motherhood")
- Masking is exhausting and a key trigger for burnout, but unmasking can lead to shame and vulnerability due to societal stigma
- Autistic mothers often feel they are internalising high standards and striving to meet unattainable ideals

• System fatigue

- Autistic mothers often face judgement, misunderstanding, and discrimination from professionals (health, social care, education) and society at large
- Navigating health, education, and social care systems for their children is emotionally and cognitively draining.
- Mothers often have to advocate for their children, repeatedly retelling their stories to professionals who may lack autism understanding, leading to further exhaustion and feelings of being judged or discriminated against



• Sensory and emotional overload



- Motherhood involves unavoidable sensory input (e.g., noise, touch, smells), which can be overwhelming for autistic mothers
- Mothers have to manage both their own and their children's emotional needs, often without adequate support
 - Many experience hyper-empathy, feeling their children's emotions intensely, which adds to emotional exhaustion



Signs of burnout in autistic mothers

Signs of burnout checklist

Tick all the symptoms of burnout you are currently experiencing. This checklist provides a total score out of 52 - the higher the score the more likely you are in burnout. The checklist is designed to be used over time to monitor changes in burnout. It can also be used as a basis for your 'burnout management plan'.

	Date	Date			Date		
		Reduced	No change	Increased	Reduced	No change	Increased
Physical symptoms							
Physical fatigue/exhaustion (not due to illness)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Needing more sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Struggling to get out of bed in the morning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sleep disturbances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress-related health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unexplained headaches/migraines or muscle tension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weakened immune system	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cognitive symptoms							
Mental fatigue/exhaustion; brain fog	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concentration difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased forgetfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slowed-down thinking; difficulties thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased problem-solving abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Needing more processing time than usual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduction in skills and abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased demand avoidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Executive functioning symptoms							
Increased difficulty with planning or decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased difficulty with starting or finishing tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased struggles with changes in routine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties switching between tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced ability to focus on tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced capacity for self-care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased rigidity/less able to be flexible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased difficulty with memory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced engagement in special/enjoyable interests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduced ability to control impulses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Signs of burnout in autistic mothers

Signs of burnout checklist cont...

	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	
		Reduced	No change	Increased	Reduced	No change	Increased
Emotional symptoms							
Increased difficulties managing emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily overwhelmed by emotions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased number/intensity of meltdowns/shutdowns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased mood swings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional numbness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased anxiety or depressive symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased irritability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suicidal or intrusive thoughts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased rejection sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased dissociation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social symptoms							
Withdrawal from social interactions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoiding social situations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased masking or difficulty masking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased capacity to socialise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties when trying to communicate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased isolation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties selecting the 'right' facial expressions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talking to people feels like too much effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased periods of situational mutism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensory symptoms							
Increased auditory processing difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in engagement in stimming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased tolerance for sounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changed tolerance for sights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changed tolerance for touch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changed tolerance for smells	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changed tolerance for tastes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changed sensory seeking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total							

Causes of burnout in autistic mothers



Multiple factors can contribute to burnout simultaneously, and often when autistic mothers are asked what is contributing to their burnout, they respond with vague comments like “life” or “everything”, not able to articulate or identify different factors. However, if we can start to think about what factors may have more of an impact, we might be able to identify where we can make specific changes to start to reduce burnout (Kemp & Mitchelson, 2024).

Tick all of the factors that you feel are contributing to you burnout, identifying if they have a significant impact or some impact. There is space at the bottom for you to add any specific factors that are not included in this list.

	Significant impact	Some impact
Needing to mask/conceal your differences or socially camouflage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People-pleasing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor or no boundaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caring for others, particularly if they have complex needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of support or accommodations from others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiences of discrimination, bullying, trauma, and exclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interpersonal conflict and relationship breakdowns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensory overload and overstimulation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boredom and lack of stimulation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Excessive pressure from others, being expected to meet unrealistic standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Striving to achieve perfectionist standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor health, chronic pain or poor sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Isolation and loneliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial, housing, and employment stress, including being underemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unexpected life changes, accidents, or major health problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Executive functioning overload, e.g. from taking on too many projects once	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too high workload	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental load	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Identify the top three factors that are currently having the biggest negative impact on you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Barriers to the effective management of burnout



Research highlights specific and **unique barriers** that autistic mothers face that negatively impact their ability to manage and recover from burnout (Higgins et al., 2021; Lockington & Gullon-Scott, 2025; Pearson et al., 2024; Rabba et al., 2024). These barriers include:

• Ongoing parenting demands

- Most advice for managing and recovering from burnout is not realistic for mothers with children
- The demands of motherhood - managing multiple schedules, emotional labour, and ongoing parenting responsibilities - are intensified for autistic mothers, contributing to depletion and leaving little opportunity for rest or engagement in personal interests
- Many mothers prioritise their children's needs over their own, especially when their children are also neurodivergent. While this is a coping strategy, it often comes at the expense of their own well-being and can exacerbate burnout



- There is a persistent sense of guilt associated with not meeting societal expectations of motherhood. Many mothers feel they must excel, which is often unmanageable and contributes to chronic stress
- Furthermore, there is a lack of tailored support for autistic mothers - most available information does not consider the realities of parenting

• Lack of support

- Withdrawal is often necessary for recovery, but this can lead to increased social isolation, as well as the absence of practical help (e.g., with childcare, household tasks), meaning mothers cannot fully rest or recover
- Further, the need for "downtime" to self-regulate is often unmet, as mothers may be unable to withdraw from their caregiving role due to lack of support or understanding from others
- Many autistic working mothers report minimal or no formal support, either because services are inaccessible, not tailored to their needs, or because they have been dismissed by professionals due to their ability to "appear" competent
- Some mothers stop seeking help after repeated experiences of being misunderstood or dismissed by professionals and support agencies. This leads to a pattern of coping alone, even when overwhelmed



(Gore et al., 2024; Lockington & Gullon-Scott, 2025; Pearson et al., 2024; Rabba et al., 2024).



Barriers to the effective management of burnout

• Stigma, dismissals and negative societal perceptions

- These difficulties are often perpetuated by stigma, as autistic mothers are often blamed for their children's difficulties or for not meeting neurotypical parenting standards, regardless of their actual parenting abilities, increasing mothers' "pressure to perform"
- Negative societal perceptions, stereotypes and stigma often results in judgement, internalised shame, and fear of being labelled "unfit"
- Education, health, and social care systems are often inflexible and do not accommodate the unique needs of autistic mothers, leading to further stress and exclusion
- Autism, as an invisible disability, is often not recognised or understood by others, including family, colleagues, and professionals. Because autistic women may mask their difficulties, their struggles are frequently overlooked, leading to a lack of support and increased pressure to cope alone
- Medical professionals and support systems often do not recognise autistic burnout as a distinct condition, leading to misdiagnosis (often as depression) and inappropriate treatment



Implications

- Burnout is chronic and pervasive. For many autistic working mothers, burnout is not a temporary state but a chronic condition resulting from the intersection of gender, autism, and parenting responsibilities (Gore et al 2024).
- There is a critical need for greater understanding, validation, and tailored support from health professionals, employers, and support agencies to address and prevent burnout in this population.
- Unmanaged burnout can result in:
 - Increased manifestation of autistic struggles
 - Difficulty with emotion processing, often leading to emotional numbness
 - Decreased functional capacity, sometimes to the point of incapacitation
 - Withdrawal and self-isolation
 - Negative impact on self-image and trust in others
 - In severe cases, suicidal ideation or attempts





Strategies to address burnout

As we have seen, managing burnout as an autistic mother can sometimes feel like an impossible task. Recovery strategies often requires withdrawal from social and external demands, unmasking, time spent on personal interests, stimming, and gradual re-engagement with activities. They often require much more from ourselves than is possible to give within that parenting role. Research shows that autistic mothers are much less likely to fully recover from burnout because of constant demands, with some mothers not returning to previous levels of functioning (Higgins et al., 2021).



The limited research on burnout in autistic mothers has identified strategies that can support recovery that take into account parenting demands on time and energy. It is important to remember that these are suggested strategies - they are only beneficial if they work for you. Also, implementing one strategy is better than none - if you can only manage one change right now, you're doing amazing!

Prioritising rest and relaxation, demand reduction, and self-care



Research on burnout highlights the importance of prioritising rest and relaxation, demand reduction, and self-care - this is a key part of recovery (Higgins et al., 2021; Pearson et al., 2024). As mothers, this can feel like another impossible demand, often adding to our stress and overwhelm.

It is however a necessary part of management and recovery. So how can we do this?

First we need to figure out what these concepts actually mean to you - often our understandings are based on neurotypical norms, like getting a full nights sleep or spa days!

Self-care refers to the actions and practices used to maintain physical, emotional and mental well-being. Autistic mothers often prioritise their children's needs above their own, leading to neglect of their own self-care. This is reinforced by societal and internal expectations to be a "good mother," often at the expense of their own wellbeing.

Rest and relaxation may mean getting more sleep, or it might mean reading a couple of pages of a book, listening to a podcast in the car, spending 5 minutes in the garden, going to the toilet alone, engaging in a special interest, sitting in the dark, or spending time with safe people - what ever it is, the key is that it rejuvenates and restores you (Neff, 2024).

It can be helpful to schedule regular times for your preferred 'rest' activity.

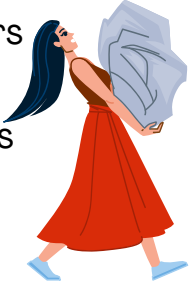


Strategies to address burnout



Demand reduction

Cognitive overload and the stress of constant demands are identified as key factors of autistic burnout (Pearson et al., 2024). Demand reduction is not about neglecting responsibilities, but about prioritising survival and recovery. Small, practical changes can make a significant difference in managing and recovering from burnout.



• Household task demands

- Let go of non-essential chores. Prioritise only the most necessary household tasks (e.g., feeding children, basic hygiene) and allow less urgent tasks to wait
- Use shortcuts. Opt for ready meals, online grocery shopping, move your kids wardrobe to the laundry so its easier to put away (best thing I ever did)
- Set up automatic payments and use technology to reduce tasks
- Have things stored in order of use., e.g. in the kitchen, have all the items used for breakfast stored in order to reduce cognitive and physical energy use

• Parenting demands

- Sell off the children...no wait, we can't do that
- Throw neurotypical parenting expectations in the bin - we do not need to eat dinner at the table every night (this is often not quality family time!), kids don't need to shower every day - Where are the biggest arguments happening? Are there neurotypical expectations that you can let go of?
- Skip non-essential activities, e.g. not attending every school event
- Delegating tasks - Ask partners, older children, or friends to take on specific responsibilities - this can include responsibility for the mental load
- Accept help from others e.g. family or friends offering to look after the kids

• Social demands

- Say no to extra commitments. Decline invitations to social events, work activities, or other activities that are not essential - its ok to say no!
- Limit social interactions. Reduce or pause non-essential communication with friends, extended family, or professionals
- Find safe places you can unmask or safe people you can unmask with
- Use alternative communication - If verbal communication is too demanding, use text messages, written notes, or visual aids - all communication is valid



• Routine and structure

- Establishing predictable daily routines can reduce anxiety and cognitive overload
 - Organising tools like setting alarms and reminders on phones, visual schedules, planners, lists, and organising apps can aid in managing executive functioning challenges and organising tasks, reducing cognitive demands



• Internalised ableism and neurotypical expectations

- Limit self-imposed standards. Let go of perfectionism around parenting and household management (e.g., “good enough” is truly enough)
- Connect with other neurodivergent mothers who “get it”. Join autistic-led online or local groups where experiences are validated and practical advice is shared
- Setting boundaries and saying “no” – this is ok to do, in fact, I insist!
- Make time for stimming or other self-soothing activities without interruption
- Advocating for yourself – I have no doubt you are fierce when it comes to advocating for your children – apply these skills to yourself and your needs

Physical self-care refers to meeting your body’s basic needs (sleep, nutrition, hydration, exercise, medical care). Often, traditional self-care advice doesn’t always fit autistic experiences or the realities of motherhood. Finding ways to prioritise self-care might include:

- Simplifying and structuring basic needs
 - Use routines and visual supports – predictable daily schedules or checklists for meals, rest, hydration, and medication
 - Link care tasks to existing habits – e.g., drink water after every nappy change
 - Use reminders – phone alarms, smartwatches, or visual cues to prompt eating, resting, or appointments
- Make nourishment accessible
 - Choose low-effort, sensory-safe foods that meet your nutritional needs
 - Use batch cooking, frozen meals, or meal kits to reduce executive load
 - If hunger cues are hard to notice, set timed reminders or keep snacks in visible places
- Support hydration
 - Keep a preferred bottle or cup nearby — one that feels and tastes right
 - Flavour water if plain water is aversive
 - Set visual or digital cues for drinking

Health professionals and educators



Autistic women and girls are often dismissed because health providers lack knowledge and training on the female presentation, often having very biased and stereotypical understanding of autism – It is ok (and often necessary) to change providers (GPs, OTs, speechies, paediatricians, teachers or any other providers) if they don’t have a neuroaffirming, in-depth understanding of, or are not willing to learn about autism, neurodivergence, the specific needs of females, or any other factors specific to you.



Strategies to address burnout



Sensory overload and burnout

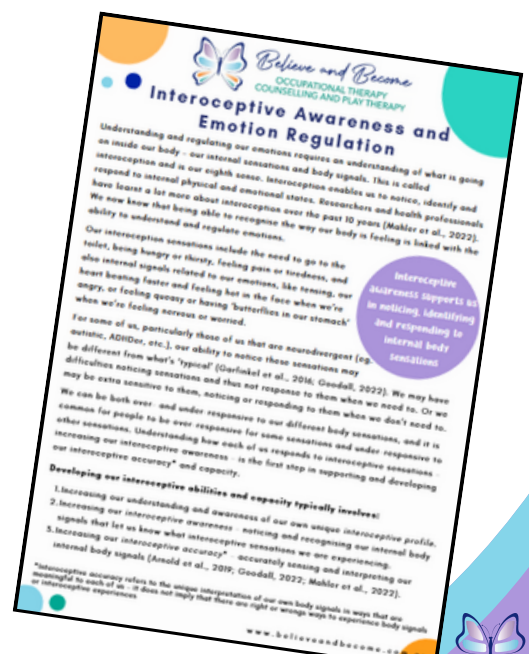
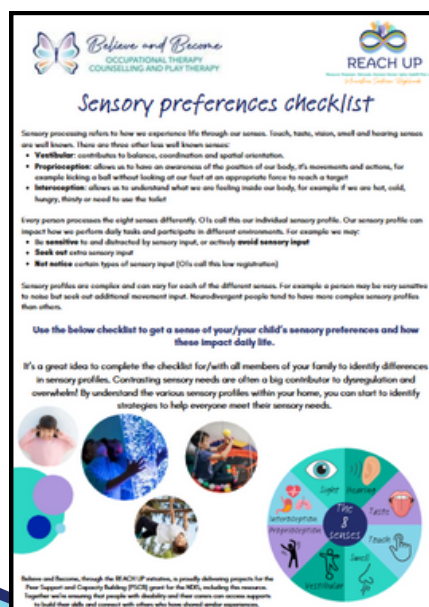
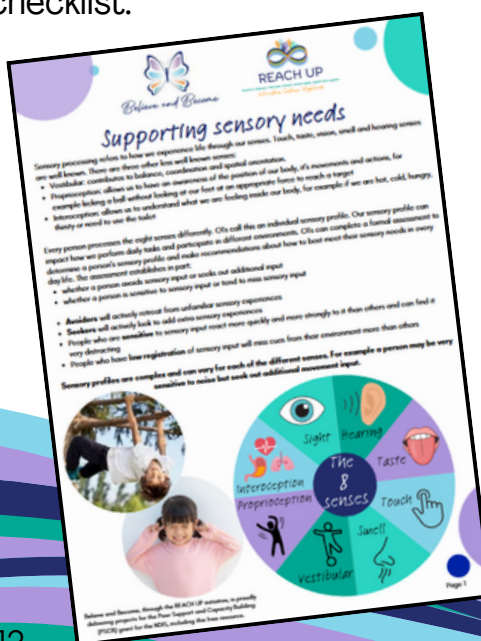
The research identifies sensory environments that are unaccommodating to autistic sensitivities as a major contributor to autistic burnout (Gore et al., 2024). Many autistic individuals, including mothers, experience heightened sensory sensitivity—this can include sensitivity to noise, light, touch, smell, or crowded environments. When sensory needs are not met or are actively disregarded, it leads to increased stress, exhaustion, and cognitive overload.

In addition, burnout can also heighten sensory sensitivity. Autistic burnout can lead to a reduced capacity to mask or camouflage these sensitivities, making them more visible and harder to manage. Some mothers report that during burnout, previously manageable sensory inputs become intolerable, leading to withdrawal, shutdowns, or even situational mutism (Pearson et al., 2024).

Managing sensory needs

The first step in managing sensory needs is understanding our sensory profile. Our sensory profile is the unique way we process sensory experiences. Everyone processes sensory information differently, and this impacts how we perform and participate in different environments. It can also be helpful to understand the sensory profiles of those living with us, as differences between sensory needs, like one person being sensitive to noise and another needing lots of noise, can add to sensory overload.

For more information on identifying and understanding sensory needs, check out our factsheet on supporting sensory needs, our sensory preferences checklist, and our interoception checklist:





Burnout management plan

Here are some questions to get you thinking about ways you can reduce demands, increase rest and relaxation, unmask, and manage sensory needs.

What is just one thing that you could do straight away to help manage or reduce burnout?

What is one thing that is 'restful' for you? How can you do more of this?

Is there one time in your day or week that you can make time for yourself?

What is one demand that you could remove or make easier?

What is one parenting task or expectation that you can stop doing?



Burnout management plan

Where is one safe place you can unmask and be authentic?

What is one boundary you could set, or one neurotypical expectation you can ignore?

What does physical self-care look like for you?

Do you have a health care provider that you don't feel respects or takes you seriously?

Do you understand your sensory needs? Have you completed the sensory profile checklist?

Conducting a sensory audit in the home



A sensory audit is a structured way of examining your environment to see how it affects your senses and overall comfort. A sensory audit helps you notice:

- What feels good (soothing, regulating)
- What feels uncomfortable or draining
- What could be adjusted to better support daily functioning and wellbeing

Step 1: Choose one space at a time

- Start small — one room or area (e.g., kitchen, bedroom, entryway).
- Move through each room slowly and pay attention to how your body feels — tense, calm, overstimulated, or relaxed.

Step 2: Explore each sensory domain

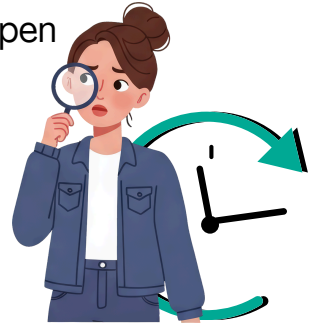
Sense	Audit Questions	Ideas for Adjustments
Sight (Visual)	Are the lights harsh or too dim? Are there cluttered areas or bright colours that feel overwhelming?	Use warm, indirect lighting, reduce clutter, use neutral tones or soft patterns
Sound (Auditory)	Are there constant background noises? Do echoes or sudden sounds cause stress?	Add soft furnishings (rugs, curtains), use white noise or calming music, turn off unneeded electronics
Touch (Tactile)	Are there textures that irritate (scratchy fabrics, sticky surfaces)? Are comfort items accessible?	Use soft, preferred textures (blankets, cushions), change bedding or clothing materials
Smell (Olfactory)	Are there strong odours (cleaning products, perfumes, cooking smells)?	Choose unscented products, improve ventilation, use soothing scents
Taste (Oral)	Are there sensory-safe food and drink options available?	Keep preferred flavours and textures stocked; avoid overwhelming smells from certain foods
Movement (Vestibular)	Do you have opportunities for movement or stillness as needed?	Include rocking chairs, swings, or calm zones for stillness
Body Awareness (Proprioception)	Is there space to move, stretch, or get deep pressure input?	Use weighted blankets, stretch bands, or soft furniture for grounding

Conducting a sensory audit in the home



Step 3: Observe patterns throughout the day

- Notice when and where meltdowns, shutdowns, or fatigue tend to happen
 - Are mornings overwhelming?
 - Is one area always avoided?
 - Do certain noises or lighting trigger stress?
- Patterns reveal what to adjust first



Step 4: Involve everyone

- If you have children or a partner, include their perspectives:
 - Ask what feels “too much,” “just right,” or “calm”
 - Use visuals or emojis for kids to communicate preferences

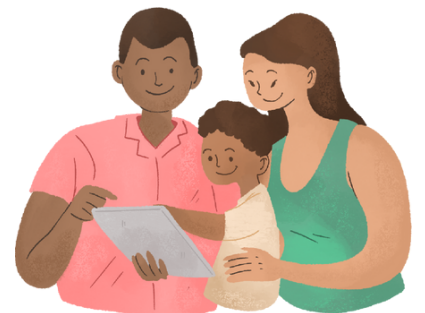
Step 5: Create a plan

- Write a short plan for each area:
 - What sensory supports to add (e.g., soft lamp, weighted blanket, quiet corner)
 - What to reduce or remove (e.g., fluorescent lights, strong scents)
 - What to experiment with
- You can use a sensory audit checklist to track your observations



Step 6: Revisit regularly

- Your sensory needs can change with stress, hormones, sleep, and life stages — recheck your home environment every few months
- An Occupational Therapist or Developmental Educator can support you to conduct a Sensory Environmental Audit of your home



Resources and references



Burnout-specific resources

Reframing Autism – Navigating Autistic Burnout: Self-care Strategies to Recover and Recalibrate – <https://reframingautism.org.au/navigating-autistic-burnout-self-care-strategies-to-recover-and-recalibrate/>

Neurodivergent Insights – Autistic Burnout Symptoms: How to Spot Burnout – https://neurodivergentinsights.com/autistic-burnout-symptoms/?srsId=AfmBOOpU3obBkRgUiSyN2YfAzlq0J4aUj7tTSGGtzZ6A2_vop6vHXzCt

Amaze – Autistic Burnout – https://www.amaze.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/AC-Managing-Burnout-Resources.pdf?utm_content=sked_666bb719b1a78803c85d114d&utm_medium=social&utm_name=sked&utm_source=facebook

AutismCRC – Investigating autistic burnout – <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/reports/autistic-burnout>

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