

This Environment Is Too Much

A neurodivergent space to identify what around you is creating overload.

Sometimes the problem is not that you need to cope better. The environment may genuinely be asking too much of your nervous system. Sound, light, smell, temperature, touch, movement, people, clutter and unpredictability can stack together until your body says: enough.

Start outside yourself

Instead of asking 'What is wrong with me?', try asking 'What is happening around me, and what is it costing my body to stay here?'

The hardest thing here is...

I want to get away from...

If I could change one thing immediately...

What Is Hitting My Senses?

You can be affected by more than one kind of input at the same time.

Use the spaces below to describe what is happening. You can name the exact sound, light, smell or sensation rather than simply writing 'too much'. That can make patterns easier to recognise later.

Sound

Voices, traffic, appliances, music, chewing, alarms, echoes, competing conversations.

Light & visual input

Brightness, flicker, screens, fluorescent lighting, clutter, movement, patterns, too many things to look at.

Smell, taste & air

Perfume, food, cleaning products, smoke, stale air, humidity or strong tastes.

Touch & clothing

Labels, seams, fabric, unexpected touch, people brushing past, chairs, shoes or pressure.

Space, Movement & People

Sensory overload can also come from how a space behaves.

Crowds and personal space

People too close, being bumped, queues, busy rooms, nowhere to retreat, feeling watched or trapped.

Movement and unpredictability

People walking past, vehicles, doors opening, sudden activity, things changing position or not knowing what will happen next.

Temperature and physical comfort

Too hot, too cold, draughts, humidity, uncomfortable seating, pain, hunger, thirst or tiredness increasing sensitivity.

What Is My Body Doing Here?

Your reaction may be the clearest clue that the environment has exceeded your capacity.

You might notice jaw tension, headache, nausea, pain, heat, shaking, buzzing, irritability, losing words, crying, going quiet, needing to pace, needing to cover your ears, wanting to remove clothing, wanting everyone to stop talking, or an urgent need to leave.

My physical reaction

My thoughts / words / feelings

What I feel an urge to do

Change the Environment, Not Just Yourself

Small adjustments can remove real load from the nervous system.

Think practically. Which inputs can be reduced, removed, predicted or controlled? You do not have to earn an adjustment by becoming distressed enough.

What needs to be LOWER / QUIETER?

Sound, brightness, number of people, talking, movement, temperature, information or demands.

What needs to be REMOVED?

A smell, item of clothing, screen, conversation, task, person, background noise or unnecessary sensory input.

What needs to be ADDED?

Headphones, sunglasses, familiar object, clearer plan, breaks, personal space, movement, fresh air, predictable information or support.

What I Need People to Understand

An adjustment is not a rejection of other people. It can be what makes participation possible.

A message from Maggie

If an environment hurts, overwhelms or exhausts you, forcing yourself to remain in it does not prove that the difficulty was small. Neurodivergent people can spend years overriding sensory signals because other people appear comfortable. Your experience does not have to match theirs to be real. Notice what changes your body, what helps it settle, and what makes things worse. The aim is not to remove every challenge from life. It is to understand your nervous system well enough to make environments more accessible wherever you can.

What I want someone else to know

A useful sentence for me

Example: 'This environment is overwhelming my senses. I need to change the input before I can continue.'

Further reading

- National Autistic Society — sensory differences and sensory processing.
- Dunn, W. (2007). Supporting participation through sensory processing knowledge.
- Kapp, S. K. (ed.) (2020). Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement.
- Price, D. (2022). Unmasking Autism.

For reflection and support. Individual sensory needs vary; seek appropriate professional support where needed.