

Everything Is Too Much

For the moments when there isn't one problem — it has all piled up.

Sometimes there is no single trigger to identify. The noise, people, demands, thoughts, emotions, sensory input, decisions and exhaustion have stacked together until your system has no spare capacity left. You do not need to sort it before you are allowed to say: everything is too much.

First: do not organise it

Dump it out exactly as it arrives. Repeated words, unfinished sentences, anger, confusion and 'I don't know' are all allowed.

GET IT ALL OUT

What Has Piled Up?

Only separate it if separating it helps.

SENSORY

Noise, light, smell, touch, temperature, clothing, crowds, movement.

PEOPLE

Conversations, conflict, expectations, being watched, misunderstood or needed.

DEMANDS

Tasks, decisions, deadlines, appointments, messages, chores, transitions.

THOUGHTS

Loops, worries, remembering, planning, analysing, unfinished mental tasks.

There Is More Underneath

Overload can include feelings, physical reactions and things you cannot change.

EMOTIONS

Anger, sadness, fear, frustration, shame, disappointment, grief, loneliness, confusion or feelings you cannot name.

BODY

Pain, fatigue, hunger, nausea, tension, racing heart, buzzing, restlessness, heat, tears, shutdown or needing to escape.

THINGS I CANNOT CONTROL

Other people's choices, delays, uncertainty, illness, weather, systems, waiting, changes or circumstances outside your control.

What Is Taking the Most From Me?

You do not have to solve everything. Find the biggest drains first.

When everything feels equally urgent, your brain may struggle to prioritise. Instead of asking what is most important to everyone else, notice what is costing you the most capacity right now.

The thing using the MOST energy

The thing making my BODY react most

The thing I keep thinking about

What Can Come Off the Pile?

Reducing load is a valid response to overload.

This is not a productivity exercise. The aim is to create some capacity. Something may be postponed, cancelled, simplified, delegated, ignored for now or done differently.

WHAT CAN WAIT?

What genuinely does not need to happen today or right now?

WHAT CAN STOP?

What input, conversation, task, notification, demand or expectation can pause?

WHAT CAN SOMEONE ELSE TAKE?

A task, decision, phone call, explanation, practical job, childcare, admin or simply being the person who answers questions.

What Do I Need Right Now?

Not for the whole week. Not forever. Just the next part.

Possibilities include silence, darkness, headphones, movement, pressure, familiar sensory input, food or drink, warmth, cool air, no talking, fewer choices, reassurance, clear information, being alone, someone staying nearby, sleep, crying, stimming, cancelling something, leaving the environment or simply not having to decide yet.

For my BODY

For my BRAIN

From OTHER PEOPLE

You Do Not Have to Carry It All at Once

When capacity is gone, reducing the load matters more than pushing harder.

A message from Maggie

There are times when asking yourself to identify the one thing that is wrong simply creates another demand. Sometimes it really is everything together. Neurodivergent overload can be cumulative: each sound, question, decision, change, social interaction and unfinished task takes a little more capacity until there is none left to give. You are allowed to stop adding to the pile. You are allowed to postpone, ask for help, reduce input, change plans or say that you cannot do something right now. Getting through overload is not about proving how much you can tolerate. It is about listening when your system tells you it has reached its limit.

One thing I am taking off the pile

One sentence I can use with someone else

Example: 'Everything has stacked up and I have no capacity left. I need fewer demands right now.'

Further reading

- National Autistic Society — sensory differences, meltdowns and shutdowns.
- Price, D. (2022). Unmasking Autism.
- Kapp, S. K. (ed.) (2020). Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement.
- Raymaker, D. M. et al. (2020). 'Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure': Autistic Burnout.

For reflection and support. Seek urgent support if you are in immediate danger or unable to keep yourself safe.