

Lower the Noise

Overwhelm is not always caused by one large problem. Sometimes it is the accumulation of sound, notifications, conversations, unfinished thoughts, visual clutter, decisions and expectations all arriving at the same time. Your brain is trying to filter what matters while continuing to respond to everything around you. Eventually even a small sound or another question can feel like too much.

Noise is more than sound

Noise can be auditory, visual, digital, emotional or mental. It may be a television playing in the background, several people talking, repeated phone alerts, a crowded room, a busy desktop, too many browser tabs, an uncomfortable light, a long list of decisions or the feeling that somebody may ask something of you at any moment. What feels manageable on one day can feel unbearable on another because capacity changes.

Reduce one layer

You do not have to create perfect silence. Look for one layer of input that can be removed. Silence non-essential notifications. Turn off background media. Close tabs you are not using. Move into a quieter room. Dim a light. Put one visually busy pile out of sight. Ask for ten minutes without conversation. Reducing even one stream of information gives the brain slightly less to process.

Sensory overload is real

For some people, particularly autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people, sensory information may be experienced intensely or may become much harder to filter when tired, stressed or already overloaded. Sound, light, touch, smell, movement and competing conversations can build until thinking, speaking, decision-making or emotional regulation becomes difficult. Reducing sensory demand is not being difficult; it can be an important regulation strategy.

Notice what your body tells you

You may recognise overload through physical signs before you consciously identify the noise. Your jaw may tighten, your shoulders rise, your breathing change, your head ache, your skin feel uncomfortable, or you may suddenly need to leave. You might become irritable or lose the ability to follow conversation. These signs can be useful information that your system needs less input.

Create a lower-noise option

Think about what is realistically available to you. Headphones or ear defenders may help some people. Others may need a quiet room, softer lighting, fewer screens, a predictable routine or permission not to talk for a while. At work or at home, it can help to agree on a simple phrase that communicates 'I need less input right now'

without requiring a long explanation.

Your Lower-the-Noise Check-In

Use this page when everything feels too loud, busy or demanding. You do not need to remove every source of stimulation. Find the one change most likely to give your system a little more space.

What am I hearing?

Notice voices, music, television, traffic, appliances, notifications and background sounds. Which one can be reduced, paused or moved away from?

What am I seeing?

Notice screens, movement, bright lights, clutter, open tabs and things waiting to be done. Is there one part of your visual environment you can simplify for the next few minutes?

What is demanding a response?

Sometimes the loudest 'noise' is the expectation to answer. Messages can wait. A conversation can sometimes be paused. A decision can be delayed. Ask yourself which demands genuinely need a response now and which can leave your attention temporarily.

What helps my system settle?

Think about what has genuinely helped before rather than what you believe should help. It might be quiet, repetitive movement, familiar music, a weighted blanket, stepping outside, dim lighting, being alone, being with a trusted person, or simply having nobody ask you questions for ten minutes.

Message from Maggie

When everything is coming at you at once, you do not have to prove that you can tolerate more. Sometimes helping yourself means reducing the amount your brain and body are being asked to process. Lower one source of noise. Give yourself a little more room. You can decide what comes next when your system is not fighting quite so hard to filter everything.

When overload is affecting everyday life

If sensory or information overload happens frequently or significantly affects work, relationships, sleep or everyday functioning, consider discussing it with a GP, therapist, occupational therapist or another appropriate professional. Support can include understanding triggers, environmental adjustments, communication strategies and ways of managing sensory demands that fit the individual rather than expecting them simply to tolerate more.