

Step-by-Step Guide for Dealing with Burnout

Dealing with burnout can be especially challenging for individuals with autism, as sensory overload, routines, and communication struggles can make it more intense. Here's a step-by-step guide designed to help:

1. Identify the Signs of Burnout

- **How it feels:** You may feel extremely tired, overwhelmed, sensitive to sensory input (like noise or light), emotionally drained, or have difficulty focusing.
 - **What to do:** Write down the signs you are experiencing. Examples:
 - Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
 - Feeling more irritable or anxious than usual.
 - Loss of interest in things you usually enjoy.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Recognizing the signs early allows you to take steps to prevent burnout from getting worse.
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2. Take a Sensory Break

- **How it feels:** Sensory overload can be a big part of burnout. You might feel overwhelmed by noises, lights, or people.
 - **What to do:**
 - Go to a quiet, calm place.
 - Use noise-cancelling headphones or play soothing music.
 - Dim the lights if they feel too bright.
 - Wrap yourself in a blanket or hold something soft for comfort.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Reducing sensory input can help your brain and body relax.
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3. Set Boundaries

- **How it feels:** You might feel like people are asking too much of you or that you can't keep up with everything.
- **What to do:**
 - Politely say no to tasks that feel too overwhelming.
 - Ask for more time to complete things if needed.
 - Use scripts like: "I need to take a break," or "I can't do this right now, but I can help later."
- **Why it's helpful:** Setting boundaries protects your energy and helps prevent further exhaustion.

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4. Use a 'Rest Routine'

- **How it feels:** Your brain and body need a reset. It can be hard to relax when you're burnt out.
 - **What to do:** Create a simple rest routine you can follow. Examples:
 - Spend 10-15 minutes focusing on deep breathing.
 - Watch a calming show or listen to music that relaxes you.
 - Take a nap or lie down with your eyes closed for 20-30 minutes.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Following a routine helps your mind and body know it's time to rest and recover.
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5. Limit Stimulation

- **How it feels:** You might find it hard to tolerate extra sensory input (like too much noise or crowded spaces).
 - **What to do:**
 - Take breaks from screens (phone, computer, TV) if they are overwhelming.
 - Spend time in low-stimulation environments, such as a park or a quiet room.
 - Use fidgets or calming objects to help regulate your sensory needs.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Limiting stimulation helps reduce the sensory load on your brain, giving you space to recover.
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6. Communicate Your Needs

- **How it feels:** It can be difficult to explain what you're going through to others.
 - **What to do:**
 - Use simple phrases like "I'm feeling burnt out and need time to rest."
 - If communicating verbally is hard, write down what you're feeling or use a text message.
 - Ask for help with things like tasks or responsibilities if you need it.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Letting others know how you're feeling allows them to support you and gives you the space to focus on recovery.
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7. Prioritize Self-Care

- **How it feels:** Taking care of your basic needs might feel harder when you're burnt out.
- **What to do:**

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- Make sure you're eating regular, healthy meals and drinking enough water.
 - Move your body gently, like taking a short walk or stretching.
 - Do something calming that you enjoy, like drawing, reading, or playing with a pet.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Self-care helps restore your energy and well-being over time.
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8. Reach Out for Support

- **How it feels:** It might feel like you're facing burnout alone or that no one understands what you're going through.
 - **What to do:**
 - Talk to a trusted friend, family member, or therapist who can offer support.
 - Join an online community or support group for autistic people who may understand what you're going through.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Having someone listen or offer support can reduce feelings of isolation and help you feel more understood.
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9. Reassess Your Routine

- **How it feels:** You may feel overwhelmed by your schedule or responsibilities.
 - **What to do:**
 - Look at your daily routine and see where you can make adjustments.
 - Consider cutting back on non-essential tasks or commitments for a while.
 - Make time for relaxation and rest in your schedule each day.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Reducing your workload and adding rest can help prevent future burnout.
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10. Gradually Return to Activities

- **How it feels:** When you're starting to recover, it can feel difficult to get back into normal activities.
 - **What to do:**
 - Start with easy, enjoyable tasks or activities.
 - Pace yourself and take breaks as needed.
 - If you start to feel overwhelmed, stop and take a rest.
 - **Why it's helpful:** Gradually returning to activities ensures that you don't overextend yourself too quickly.
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