



# NEUROHERO EXPLAINERS

Evidence-informed visual guides for understanding neurodivergent experience.

# AuDHD BURNOUT

## When Two Regulation Systems Compete for Capacity

### WHAT IS AuDHD?



AuDHD is a community term often used to describe people who are both autistic and ADHD. It is not a formal diagnosis, but it reflects a well-recognised clinical overlap between autism and ADHD.



Autistic burnout has an emerging research base and is commonly described as chronic exhaustion, reduced functioning and reduced tolerance to sensory/social/cognitive demands. **ADHD-related burnout** is less formally defined in research, but studies link ADHD symptoms, executive function demands and burnout risk, especially in work and daily functioning contexts.

### THE CROSS-LOAD MODEL

Two regulation systems. One shared capacity. When both are under pressure, burnout risk rises.

### AUTISTIC REGULATION SYSTEM

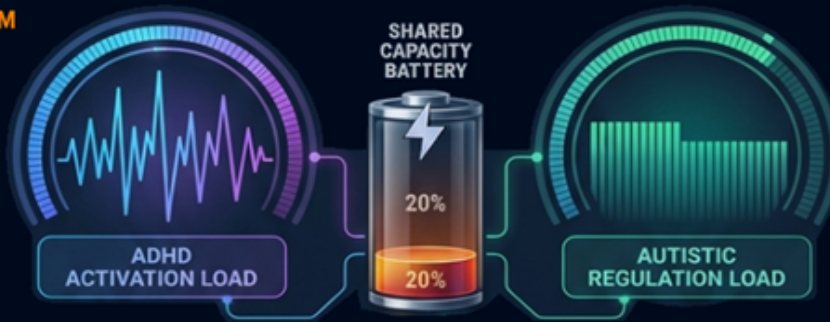
Pulls toward...

- Predictability
- Sensory safety
- Routine
- Recovery
- Reduced ambiguity
- Lower social load

### ADHD DRIVE SYSTEM

Pulls toward...

- Novelty
- Urgency
- Stimulation
- Movement
- Fast switching
- Interest-based action



Burnout risk rises when both systems are under pressure and the person has to keep functioning without enough recovery, environmental fit or support.

### OFTEN MISREAD AS

- Inconsistency
- Laziness
- Attitude
- Poor motivation
- Overreaction
- Not trying



These are not character flaws. They are signs of systems under strain.

### WHAT MAY BE HAPPENING INTERNALLY

- Executive function strain
- Sensory load
- Masking / camouflaging
- Emotional regulation load
- Task-switching friction
- Recovery debt



Two systems competing for capacity increases cognitive and nervous system load.

### HOW IT CAN SHOW UP

- Brain fog
- Irritability or overwhelm
- Withdrawal or shutdown
- Demand avoidance
- Reduced daily living skills
- Sleep disruption
- Difficulty starting or stopping tasks



Symptoms fluctuate. What looks like "fine" on the outside can still be extremely costly.

### WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Reduce demands and urgency
- Reduce sensory and social load
- Build predictable routines and external structure
- Pace stimulation and task switching
- Allow recovery before crisis
- Support transitions and decision load
- Validate experiences and emotions
- Support the system, not just the symptoms.

### THE CROSS-LOAD CYCLE



ACTIVATION

Demands, stimulation or stress increase.



OVEREXTENSION

Both systems pull hard. Capacity is used up faster.



OVERLOAD

Too much in, not enough capacity left.



SHUTDOWN / CRASH

Body and brain hit the brakes to protect.



RECOVERY ATTEMPT

Rest, reduce load, regulate, feel better.



RENEWED PRESSURE

Demands return without enough buffer.

The cycle repeats without enough recovery, support or environmental fit.



### KEY TAKEAWAY

It is not "too much autism" or "too much ADHD." It may be too much unmanaged load on a nervous system trying to meet competing demands. The goal is not to do more — it is to create enough capacity to live and thrive.



### EVIDENCE BASED

Grounded in current research on autistic burnout, ADHD, stress, executive function, sensory processing and nervous system regulation.

### REFERENCES

- Raymaker, D. M., et al. (2020). "Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure". *Autistic burnout. Autism in Adulthood*, 2(2), 132-143.
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- McEwen, B. S., & Wingfield, J. C. (2003). The concept of allostasis in biology and biomedicine. *Hormones and Behavior*, 43(1), 2-15.

References available upon request.



NeuroHERO

Giving neurodivergent people a voice - on their terms.