



Neurodiversity
Specialists

NEURODIVERSITY & CHRONIC CONDITIONS

UNDERSTANDING THE OVERLAP THROUGH A NEURO- AFFIRMING LENS

What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity recognises that there are many natural variations in how people:

- think,
- process information,
- communicate,
- learn,
- regulate emotions,
- and experience the world.

Examples of neurodivergent identities may include:

- Autism
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia (DCD)
- Dyscalculia
- Tourette Syndrome
- OCD
- Auditory Processing Differences



Neurodivergence is not inherently negative or “wrong” — it reflects different neurological processing styles with both strengths and challenges.



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UNDERSTANDING CHRONIC CONDITIONS

A chronic condition is a long-term health condition that may fluctuate over time and impact daily functioning.

Examples may include:

- Chronic fatigue
- Fibromyalgia
- Migraines
- IBS and digestive conditions
- Hypermobility / Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS)
- Autoimmune conditions
- Chronic pain conditions
- Anxiety and depression
- Sleep disorders
- Dysautonomia / POTS



Some conditions are visible, while many remain invisible to others.

THE OVERLAP BETWEEN NEURODIVERSITY & CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Research and lived experience increasingly show that neurodivergent individuals may experience higher rates of chronic physical and mental health conditions.



This overlap can affect:

- energy levels,
- sensory tolerance,
- communication,
- emotional regulation,
- executive functioning,
- physical wellbeing,
- and recovery capacity.

For many individuals, these experiences are interconnected rather than separate.



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COMMON EXPERIENCES

Neurodivergent individuals living with chronic conditions may experience:

Cognitive & Emotional Impact



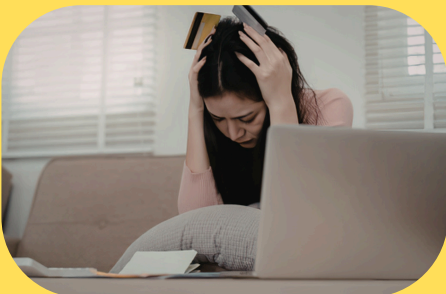
- Brain fog
- Memory difficulties
- Difficulty concentrating
- Emotional exhaustion
- Increased overwhelm
- Anxiety or shutdown

Physical Impact



- Chronic fatigue
- Pain or tension
- Migraines
- Sleep disruption
- Sensory sensitivity
- Digestive difficulties

Daily Living Impact



- Difficulty maintaining routines
- Inconsistent energy levels
- Challenges with appointments or medication management
- Recovery needs after social interaction or overstimulation



THE ROLE OF MASKING & CHRONIC STRESS

Many neurodivergent people spend years:

- masking traits,
- suppressing natural responses,
- overcompensating socially,
- or adapting to inaccessible environments.

Over time, chronic stress and nervous system overload may contribute to:

- burnout,
- fatigue,
- anxiety,
- emotional dysregulation,
- and worsening physical symptoms.



Masking can often come at a significant physical and emotional cost.

NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT

Burnout is more than simply feeling stressed or tired.

It may present as:

- extreme exhaustion,
- withdrawal,
- increased sensory sensitivity,
- shutdown,
- reduced tolerance for demands,
- emotional numbness,
- or loss of previously manageable skills.



Recovery often requires:

- reduced demands,
- flexibility,
- sensory regulation,
- pacing,
- rest,
- and supportive environments.



HEALTHCARE & SUPPORT CHALLENGES

Many neurodivergent individuals report difficulties accessing healthcare due to:

- sensory overwhelm in medical environments,
- communication differences,
- difficulty describing symptoms,
- previous negative experiences,
- delayed diagnosis,
- or feeling dismissed or misunderstood.

This can lead to:

- medical anxiety,
- delayed treatment,
- or avoidance of support services.



A NEURO-AFFIRMING APPROACH

A neuro-affirming approach recognises:

- differences are not deficits,
- support should be individualised,
- and wellbeing improves when environments become more accessible.



Helpful approaches may include:

- clear communication,
- flexibility,
- sensory consideration,
- reduced shame and judgement,
- collaborative support,
- predictable structure,
- pacing and energy management,
- and validating lived experiences.



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SUPPORTING NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS WITH CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Listen Without Assumptions

Every person's experience is different.

Focus on Function, Not Labels

Understand how the condition impacts daily life.

Recognise Fluctuating Capacity

Needs and energy levels may vary day to day.

Reduce Pressure to Mask

Psychological safety matters.

Encourage Sustainable Approaches

Support pacing rather than pushing through exhaustion.

Consider the Whole Person

Physical, emotional, sensory and cognitive experiences are interconnected.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Neurodiversity and chronic conditions frequently overlap
- ✓ Many experiences are invisible to others
- ✓ Chronic stress and masking can significantly impact wellbeing
- ✓ Burnout can affect every area of life, not just work
- ✓ Support should be flexible, compassionate and individualised
- ✓ Neuro-affirming environments can improve wellbeing and long-term sustainability