

Further reading

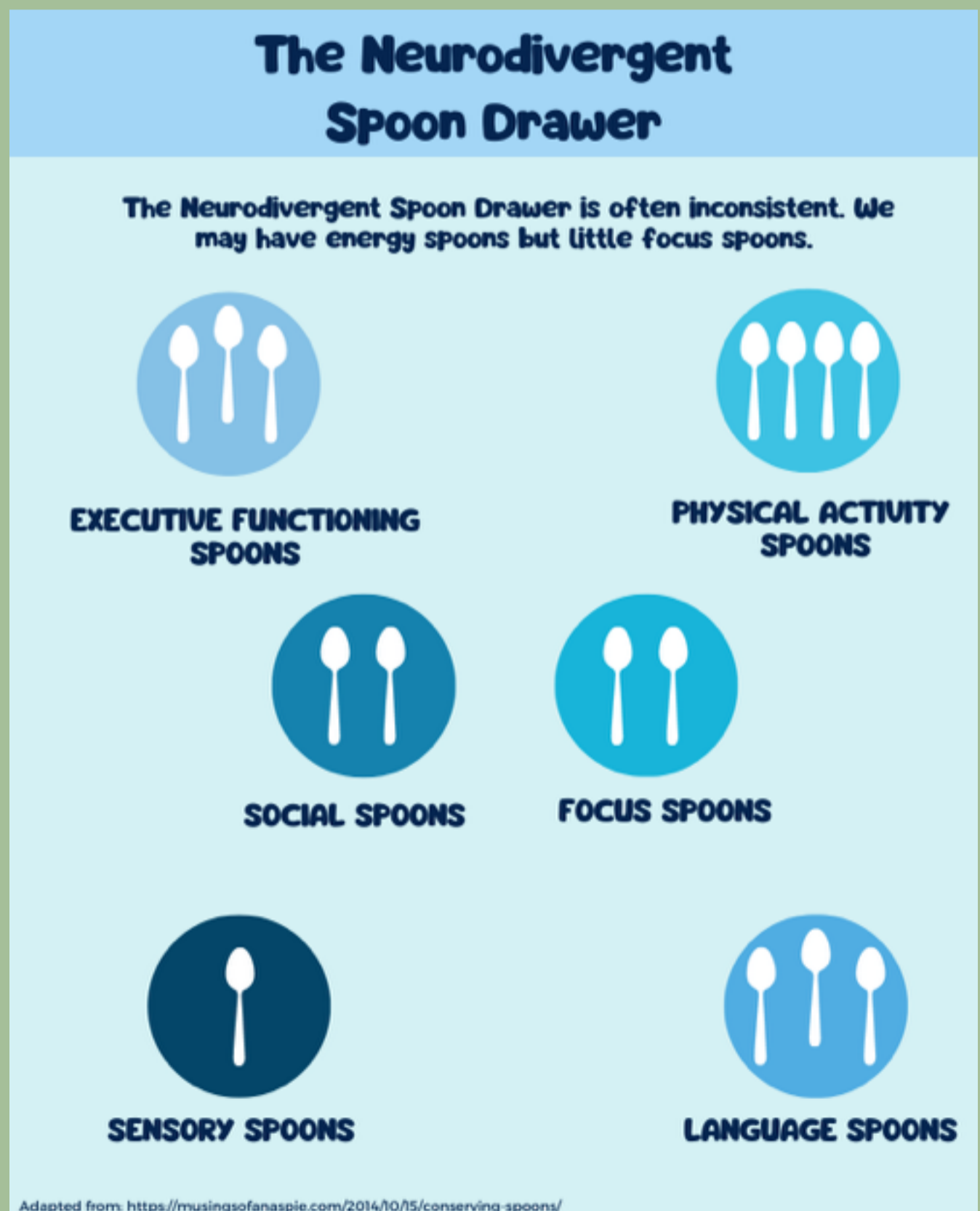
Spoon Theory

Christine Miserandino's Spoon Theory explains what it's like to live with a long term health condition.

Originally developed to explain what life is like with lupus, Spoon Theory has been adopted by the neurodivergent community as a way of explaining energy and capacity.

Spoons are used as a symbol of available energy, and we start each day with fewer spoons than those living a life free from health conditions or neurodivergence.

<https://butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/>



Fork Theory

Fork Theory was devised as a corollary to Spoon Theory. It also has roots in the chronic illness community and was posted by Tumblr blogger [@Jenrose](#), whose husband devised it.

It arose from the phrase “stick a fork in me, I’m done”.

Fork Theory uses forks as symbols for demands, triggers or things that cause sensory overwhelm, and everyone has their own limit on how many forks they can take.

Some forks are big and hard to bear (being in pain = pitchfork). Some forks are smaller and sometimes easier to cope with (tags in clothing = a tiny corn-on-the-cob fork).

If you’ve already got a pitchfork in you, that tiny fork could tip you over the edge into overwhelm or crisis. However, if you’re not full of pitchfork you may be able to deal with the tiny fork.

This theory represents how our capacity can change from day to day.

<https://www.tumblr.com/jenroses/181045322711/have-i-told-yall-about-my-husbands-fork-theory>

Shutdowns

Shutdowns are an involuntary reaction to overwhelm. Overwhelm could be from too much sensory stimulation, too many demands, or emotional stress.

A shutdown looks like a retreat and can include freezing, silence (situational mutism), a lack of response to verbal input and touch, a lack of eye contact and other signs, depending on the individual.

We need time to recover from shutdowns and to be away from the situation or the causes of that shutdown.

More on shutdowns: <https://www.actuallyautisticadult.com/shutdowns-the-causes-and-impacts>

Meltdowns

Meltdowns are another involuntary reaction to overwhelm and can have the same causes.

A meltdown can be thought of as an external shutdown and looks more like a “tantrum” although it is not.

A meltdown may include screaming, shouting, throwing items, self harm, storming out - losing one’s temper.

Meltdowns cannot be controlled, but they can also be cathartic. We need time to recover from meltdowns, and to be away from the causes of it.

Burnout

Autistic/ADHD burnout is a state of extreme exhaustion caused by long term exposure to overwhelm (of all types), the demands of society (masking) and work, loneliness, a lack of support and other personal factors.

Burnout looks like depression but is different. It cannot be treated with more social interaction and a return to work, but requires long periods of absolute rest, very low levels of sensory stimulation, a withdrawal from social activities and little or no exposure to overwhelming environments (e.g. shops, workplace, public transport).

Burnout can be recovered from, but it takes time. Burnout may also remove coping strategies and lead to a permanent reduction in capacity and skills.

Shutdowns and meltdowns are more likely in burnout and in the recovery period.

Co-occurring conditions

APD - Auditory Processing Disorder

APD is the brain struggling to process sound. It's not a problem with hearing, although it looks like it from the outside.

It can be hard to follow a conversation, especially if multiple people are talking, and accents, tones of voice and other differences can also make processing voices very difficult or impossible.

Some ways round this are to use text, to use captions and subtitles. Having conversations in quiet places, ideally one on one, is also a good solution.

SPD - Sensory Processing Disorder

This is similar to APD, but affects other senses too. Processing sight, sound, taste, texture/pressure, balance and internal senses can be a challenge.

Prosopagnosia - Face Blindness

Often affecting autistic people, face blindness is the inability to recognise, or problems recognising faces and people.

It causes problems in social and work situations as it can take several "clues" to remember who someone is - even if you see them every day.

Other co-occurring conditions

In addition to other forms of neurodiversity, many physical health issues are also commonly found in neurodivergent people. Some of these are:

- Epilepsy
- Ehlers Danlos Syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- POTS (Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome)
- Dysautonomia
- IBS
- Other gastrointestinal conditions
- ARFID (Avoidant restrictive food intake disorder)
- Apraxia
- Insomnia
- Gender Dysphoria
- Auto-immune disorders

Executive Functioning

Executive functions are skills like:

- Working memory
- Time management
- Organisation
- Prioritisation
- Self monitoring/assessment
- Impulse control
- Self regulation
- Attention
- Task initiation

We use these every day to get to work, make meals, do our jobs, do housework and every other daily activity you can think of.

Neurodivergent people can have challenges developing and using all these skills.

[Excellent image post about EF here](#)

Neurodivergent content creators and great neurodivergent-run websites

[Neurodivergent Lou](#)

[Neurowild](#)

[Chris Bonnelo - Autistic Not Weird](#)

[Embrace Autism](#)

[Neuroclastic](#)