My user manual

How my brain, body, and nervous system work best.
Written on a good day, for the hard ones.

When words and decisions are hard,
this page has already decided for you.

HOW TO USE IT

Fill it in slowly, on a calmer day, in a few minutes at a time. Each page has examples to borrow. Keep it on your phone, on the fridge, or give a copy to someone who loves you. It draws on the free guides on my site. I am not a medical professional.

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Start anywhere

There is no right order. Go to the page you need today, and print only that page if you like. Every page stands on its own. On a phone, tap any line or box to type.

People use different words for themselves. I use the ones most people have told researchers they prefer, and yours are welcome here.

> If you only have energy for one page today: **My early warning signs**, page 5.

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Written on a good day, for the hard ones.

ONE

How I work best

Start with what helps. Borrow from the examples, or write your own.

> EXAMPLES
>
> Visual reminders, not memory. Clear expectations in writing. Music or a podcast with routine tasks. Focused blocks, with quiet recovery after.

HOW MY BRAIN WORKS BEST

MY CLEAREST HOURS OF THE DAY

MY DAILY ANCHORS · THE THINGS I DO EVEN ON A HARD DAY

- [ ] Daylight in the morning, before my phone
- [ ] Protein before caffeine
- [ ] Tasks on paper, not in my head
- [ ] Quiet time after work, before the evening
- [ ] _____

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TWO

What drains my battery

Energy runs out in different ways. Write what empties yours.

Kind	Examples	Mine
Senses	Overhead lights, background chatter, scratchy clothes	
Thinking and people	Masking all day, last-minute changes, open-ended decisions	
Body and hormones	Broken sleep, skipping protein, the days before a period, perimenopause	

WHAT REFILLS ME FASTEST

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THREE

My early warning signs

Three states, and what each one needs. Add your own signs, so you notice the middle one before the last.

State	Common signs	What I need	My signs
Settled	Steady breath, soft jaw, clear, patient, able to start	Keep the rhythm. Do focus work now. Do not over-promise future days.	
Wired the amber light	Tight shoulders, racing thoughts, sudden rage, rushed	Long breaths out. Cool water. Headphones, dim light. Thoughts onto paper.	
Flat the red light	Heavy limbs, thick fog, losing words, numb, cannot start	One task only. Soft clothes, a warm mug. Safe food and water. Name three things I can see.	

Notice the amber light. It is easier to turn around there.

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FOUR

My two-minute reset menu

Pick one. No thinking needed.

When I need to	Try	My version
Quiet a racing mind	Widen my gaze to the edges of the room. Name it: "This is overload, not an emergency."	
Break a freeze	Shrink the job to one minute: open the document, one cup in the sink.	
Soothe my senses	Dark room, earplugs, lie flat or under a heavy blanket for ten minutes.	
Come back to safety	A glimmer: hot tea, a dog on my lap, one song, fresh air.	

MY GLIMMERS

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FIVE

Words for low-battery days

Write these on a good day, and save them on your phone. On a hard day, copy and send.

> TO SOMEONE AT HOME
>
> "My battery is on red right now. I am not upset with you. I need twenty minutes of quiet, with no decisions, so I can reset."

> TO A FRIEND
>
> "Low battery today, resting my brain. I will message you properly in a couple of days."

> AT WORK
>
> "So I get this right, could you put the key points and the deadline in writing for me?"

MY WORDS, FOR HOME

MY WORDS, FOR FRIENDS

MY WORDS, FOR WORK

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SIX

What I would like the people close to me to know

If you give a copy of this to someone, this page is for them.

WHEN I GO QUIET, IT USUALLY MEANS

THE MOST HELPFUL THING YOU CAN DO

PLEASE DO NOT

WHAT I LOVE, AND WHAT LIGHTS ME UP

Thank you for learning how I work.

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SEVEN

Where to continue

This printable is a place to start. Here is where to go next.

TO READ MORE

From me, free, each a place to start: *Your nervous system*, *Your brain*, *Burnout*, *Grief*, *Menopause*, *Neurodiversity*, *ADHD*, *AuDHD*, and *Advocating for yourself*.

TO FIND SUPPORT WHERE YOU LIVE · WORDS TO SEARCH, ADDING WHERE YOU LIVE

What you are looking for	Words to search
Someone to talk to	*talking therapy near me · counsellor [your town]*
Others like you	*neurodivergent adults group [your area] · burnout support group*
At work	*reasonable adjustments · occupational health*

WHAT I FOUND, AND WHO I WILL CONTACT FIRST

If you are struggling tonight and cannot wait, please do not sit with it alone. In Scotland, 111 reaches the NHS 24 Mental Health Hub at any hour, and Samaritans are on 116 123, free, day or night. In the United States and Canada, call or text 988. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists the lines that operate in your country. In an emergency, call your local emergency number.

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Where this comes from

1. The free guides on valeriemcintyrebaird.com, and the sources named in each.
2. Dana, D. (2018). *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy*. W. W. Norton. (Glimmers.)
3. Lieberman, M. D., et al. (2007). Putting feelings into words. *Psychological Science*, 18(5), 421 to 428.
4. Balban, M. Y., et al. (2023). Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal. *Cell Reports Medicine*, 4(1), 100895.

Why it is free

On a hard day, the last thing anyone can do is work out what they need. So decide it now, on a good one. This printable is yours to keep, print, and hand to someone.

I am not a medical professional. This printable diagnoses nothing and is not medical advice. If something in your body or mind worries you, please see a doctor.

Valerie McIntyre-Baird