AuDHD

Being autistic and having ADHD,
and making room for both.

Both are true.
You do not have to choose which one you are.

A PLACE TO START

For adults who are autistic and have ADHD, think they might be, or love someone who is. Plain language, based on research, with every source named. The last pages show where to continue. Written by someone who is 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: **The conditions that help**, page 7.

UNDERSTAND

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Understanding is the first act of care.

ONE

What AuDHD means

AuDHD is a word the community made for being autistic and having ADHD at the same time. It is not a formal diagnosis. It describes a real and common experience.

HOW COMMON	A 2021 review of many studies estimated that about four in ten autistic people also have ADHD.
WHY IT WAS MISSED	Until 2013, the main diagnostic manual did not allow autism and ADHD to be diagnosed together. A whole generation of adults grew up with one label, or none.
WHAT IT IS LIKE	Not simply autism plus ADHD. The two interact, and can pull in opposite directions.

Many people say finding this word was the moment their life began to make sense.

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TWO

Two sets of needs, one person

Many AuDHD adults describe a tug of war. One part of you craves a routine. Another part is bored of it by Wednesday.

THE AUTISTIC SIDE MAY WANT		THE ADHD SIDE MAY WANT
Routine	⟷	Novelty
Predictability	⟷	Spontaneity
Depth in one thing	⟷	Many things at once
Quiet and calm	⟷	Stimulation
Time to prepare	⟷	To start right now
Days of quiet after people	⟷	Connection and chat

a tug of war inside one mind

Neither side is wrong, and neither is broken. Both are trying to look after you. The work is finding ways to honour both.

WHERE I FEEL THE TUG MOST

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THREE

Why it is so often missed

Autism and ADHD can hide each other. Each can cover up signs of the other, so neither is easy to see.

What people see	What may be underneath
Chatty and sociable	Autistic social exhaustion afterwards
Firm routines	Routines built to hold ADHD steady
Calm and capable at work	Hours of masking, and collapse at home
Scattered and forgetful	An autistic need for order that cannot be met
Anxiety or depression	Years of not knowing why life was so hard

Some people notice that once ADHD medication quiets the noise, their autistic needs for routine and sensory calm become much clearer. Many people are first recognised with one, and only later with the other. Some are recognised in midlife, or after their child's diagnosis.

WHAT MAKES SENSE NOW, LOOKING BACK

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FOUR

Senses and energy

AuDHD can mean **seeking** sensation and **avoiding** it, sometimes on the same day. You may need movement and music to focus, and silence to recover.

I SEEK

- [ ] Movement, fidgeting, pacing
- [ ] Music or background sound
- [ ] Strong flavours
- [ ] Deep pressure, a heavy blanket

I AVOID

- [ ] Loud or echoing rooms
- [ ] Bright or flickering light
- [ ] Certain fabrics or labels
- [ ] Being touched without warning

You may seek stimulation right up to the moment your sensory limit snaps, and then everything is too much. Masking both sides at once takes a great deal of energy. Research links masking, and the long strain of a world that does not fit, to burnout in autistic adults.

WHAT DRAINS MY ENERGY FASTEST

WHAT RESTORES IT

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FIVE

The conditions that help

The aim is not to choose one side. It is to design days with room for both.

Planned novelty

A steady routine, with variety built in: a new walk, a new playlist, the same time.

Choice inside structure

A short list of options, so there is freedom without overwhelm.

A sensory toolkit

Headphones, a fidget, sunglasses, a quiet place.

Rest after people

Recovery time after social effort, planned, not earned.

Deep and quick

Time for a long interest, and room for short bursts of new ones.

Buffers

Time between things, and warning before change.

A second brain

Lists and calendars that hold what your mind cannot.

Your people

Others who are AuDHD, who get it without explanation.

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SIX

My both and

Write what each side of you needs in a part of your life, and one way to honour both.

Part of my life	My autistic side needs	My ADHD side needs	What honours both

> FOR EXAMPLE
>
> **Work:** the autistic side needs a clear plan and a quiet desk. The ADHD side needs variety and a deadline.
>
> **Both:** a fixed morning routine, with a different task each afternoon, and a timer.

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SEVEN

Asking for what fits

With a doctor

If you have one diagnosis and recognise the other, say so. Ask whether an assessment can look at both.

At work

A predictable structure with variety inside it. Written plans. Notice of change. A quiet place, and permission to move.

At home

Share your both and page, so others understand why you need two things that look opposite.

With yourself

Stop asking which one you are. You are both, and that is allowed.

> THREE SENTENCES
>
> "I work best with a clear weekly plan, and I need some variety inside it to stay focused. Could we agree my priorities each Monday, and let me choose the order I do them in?"

WHAT I AM ASKING FOR

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EIGHT

Where to continue

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

TO READ MORE

ADDitude magazine (additudemag.com), which has collected many AuDHD readers' stories. Your national autism and ADHD charities. From me, free: *ADHD*, *Neurodiversity*, *Burnout*, and *After the Name*.

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

What you are looking for	Words to search
Assessment	*adult autism and ADHD assessment [your country] · dual diagnosis assessment*
Others like you	*AuDHD support group · autistic-led ADHD community [your country]*
Practical help	*neurodiversity-affirming therapist · AuDHD coach · occupational therapist sensory*
Burnout	*autistic burnout support · AuDHD burnout recovery*

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

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3. Raymaker, D. M., et al. (2020). Defining autistic burnout. *Autism in Adulthood*, 2(2), 132 to 143.
4. Hull, L., et al. (2017). "Putting on my best normal": social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47, 2519 to 2534.
5. IBCCES. A living contradiction: stories of the AuDHD experience (ADDitude readers' accounts). ibcces.org.

Why it is free

So many of us felt half-right in every room, until we found a word for being both. This guide is yours to keep, print, and hand to someone.

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

Valerie McIntyre-Baird