

ENERGY

Energy describes how a young person feels in their mind and body- sometimes full of rockets, other times completely drained. Fluctuations can be misunderstood as laziness or restlessness, but they reflect genuine neurological difference.

Young people's energy levels are shaped by sleep, diet, emotions, and daily demands. For neurodivergent young people, energy can be especially affected by sensory overload, masking, and social pressures, making tailored strategies essential.

OVERVIEW

Energy is the **capacity to stay alert, active, and engaged** throughout the day. It fluctuates naturally depending on **sleep quality, nutrition, physical activity, stress, and environment**.

For young people, energy levels are closely tied to growth, learning demands, and social interactions. Everyone's energy goes up and down — that's normal.

What Affects Energy Levels

- **Sleep quality:** Broken or irregular sleep reduces energy.
- **Diet:** Limited or unbalanced diets can cause dips in energy.
- **Physical activity:** Too little movement can make you sluggish, while too much can cause fatigue.
- **Stress and emotions:** Anxiety, worry, or social pressures drain energy.
- **Environment:** Busy, noisy, or overstimulating settings can be exhausting.

Sources:

Impact on neurodiverse young people

- **Sensory overload:** Bright lights, loud sounds, or crowded spaces can quickly drain energy.
- **Masking:** Hiding or suppressing neurodivergent traits to "fit in" is mentally and physically exhausting.
- **Broken sleep:** Common in ADHD and autism, leading to lower daytime energy.
- **Social expectations:** Constant effort to interpret social cues can be tiring.
- **Dietary challenges:** Restricted food preferences or sensitivities may reduce energy intake.

- **Burnout risk:** Without support, neurodivergent young people may reach exhaustion faster than peers.

Benefits of supporting

Supporting neurodivergent young people with their **energy levels** has wide-reaching benefits for their wellbeing, learning, and relationships.

Better Learning and Focus

- When energy is managed, young people can concentrate more effectively in class.
- Reduced fatigue means they can engage with lessons and complete tasks without feeling overwhelmed.

Improved Emotional Wellbeing

- Balanced energy helps reduce stress, frustration, and anxiety.
- Young people feel more in control of their day, boosting confidence and self-esteem.

Healthier Social Connections

- With more energy, it's easier to join in with friends, clubs, and activities.
- Less exhaustion from masking or sensory overload means they can enjoy social time more authentically.

Reduced Risk of Burnout

- Supporting energy prevents the cycle of exhaustion that can lead to shutdowns or meltdowns.
- It helps young people pace themselves and avoid long-term fatigue.

Celebration of Strengths

- When energy is protected, neurodivergent young people can show their creativity, problem-solving, and unique perspectives.
- They have more opportunities to shine in areas they enjoy.

Family and School Benefits

- Parents and teachers experience less stress when young people have strategies to manage energy.
- Relationships improve because there's more understanding and fewer conflicts around tiredness or behaviour.

Why It Matters

Energy is like a battery: when you know what drains it and what recharges it, life feels easier and more enjoyable for both young people and parents.

Strategies to Improve

- **Energy accounting:** Track what activities boost energy (like hobbies, quiet time) and what drains it (like noisy environments). Balance them throughout your day.
- **Create safe spaces:** Allow time and places where young people can drop their “mask” and relax. **Have a quiet spot where you can relax and be yourself.**
- **Improve sleep routines:** Consistent bedtime, calming activities before sleep, and reduced screen time.

- **Balanced diet:** Encourage snacks and meals that provide steady energy (like fruit, nuts, or sandwiches).
- **Movement breaks:** Short breaks with stretching, walking, or dancing can refresh you.
- **Mindfulness and relaxation:** Breathing exercises, quiet time, music or sensory-friendly activities to restore energy.
- **Respect natural flow:** Recognise that neurodivergent young people may have different rhythms of energy and allow flexibility.
- **Know your rhythm:** Notice when you feel most awake and plan harder tasks for those times.

RESOURCES

<https://www.edpsyched.co.uk/blog/making-energy-visible-using-energy-accounting-to-support-school-attendance> - Energy Management tool to support school attendance. Sheffield's Children's NHS Foundation Trust

[PowerWood – Celebrating Neurodiversity and Overexcitability](#) - PowerWood C.I.C., a leading UK not-for-profit, community-driven, social venture is committed to raising awareness about neurodiversity as a positive force for change in society.

[FREE 'Exploring Overexcitability' eBook – PowerWood](#)

<https://www.theneurodiversitypractice.com> - A Space built for how you parent, think, and feel.

[Neurodiversity Hub – Energy Levels Guide](#)

[Change Mental Health – Supporting Neurodiverse People](#)

[Energy Accounting for Neurodivergent Children – Pooky Knightsmith](#)