Mental Health Toolkit for Autistic Adults

# 1. Create and maintain predictable routines

* Use schedules or planners (visual can help).
* Include downtime daily and try to avoid over-scheduling.
* Structure the day with consistent meal, sleep, and self-care times.

Why it helps: Predictability reduces anxiety and cuts out some decision making.

# 2. Manage the sensory environment

* Adjust lighting (e.g. avoid fluorescent lights, use lamps or dimmers).
* Use noise-canceling headphones, ear loops or flares.
* Wear comfortable clothing, sticking to fabrics and whatever feels right.

Why it helps: Reduces sensory overload which can lead to sensory meltdown.

# 3. Use special interests

* Make time for your interests, schedule regularly.
* Use special interests as a calming activity or self-reward.
* Join communities around them (online groups, clubs, forums).

Why it helps: They bring joy, stability, and can help with social connection.

# 4. Limit masking when it's safe

* Practice self-expression in safe spaces.
* Notice when you are masking.
* Remember masking can be exhausting and plan recovery time.

Why it helps: Long term masking is strongly linked to anxiety, depression, and burnout.

# 5. Build a sensory self-care kit

* Develop a personal sensory profile
* Set up a sensory first aid kit: include: fidgets, sunglasses, gum, scents, a weighted item.

Why it helps: Shared understanding of sensory needs. Supports self-regulation during stress or sensory overload.

# 6. Practice “shutdown recovery”

* Rest in a dark, quiet place.
* Develop a script to use that others can understand like: “I need time alone.”
* Have a recovery plan prepared for shutdowns/meltdowns.

Why it helps: Ignoring the need to shutdown leads to burnout.

# 7. Clear and STRESSLESS communication

* Use text, apps, or visuals if verbal communication is draining.
* Practice scripts for social situations.
* Ask for clarity when instructions are vague.
* Find people who you can communicate with easily, with less effort.

Why it helps: Avoids confusion and social communication anxiety.

# 8. Work with an autistic understanding therapist

* Look for autism understanding therapists.
* Avoid any approaches focused on “fixing” autism.

Why it helps: Supportive therapy might help.

# 9. Limit social exhaustion

* Schedule recovery time after social events.
* Set time boundaries for phone calls or social contacts.
* Use social energy budgeting. (Spoons therapy)

Why it helps: Prevents shutdowns and burnout from social overload.

# 10. Learn to identify and track burnout

* Use a burnout tracker (track mood, energy, sleep, sensitivity).
* Watch for early signs like irritability or withdrawal.
* Take preemptive rest.

Why it helps: Burnout is can preventable or minimized if you can recognise early.