

Scottish autism

WHERE AUTISTIC PEOPLE
ARE VALUED

Sleep and Routines

Advice and Thoughts from the Autistic Community

Sleep

'Well I've found that recently my sleep schedule has been far better, and I have absolutely no idea how I've managed that, given that it's been awful for almost as long as I can remember...'

'I've been through so many aids to sleeping. Counting sheep, involving visualising them going one by one through a gate; and focusing on my breathing, were the simplest and most effective. However, in the end I got a prescription for Melatonin (despite being younger than the prescribe-able age) which, while not leaving me refreshed, did knock me out for 6 hours at a stretch. After a week I came off it and my sleep cycle luckily seemed to have readjusted itself to sleeping better.'

'I know if I haven't had enough sleep and I am able, staying in bed later does mean I might pick up the missing sleep, but in the end it's better for me to be going to bed at a regular time.'

'If I do feel sleepy in the afternoon, I will take a 10 minute nap, it saves me fighting it for the rest of the day and it does work for me. I wake up after 10 or so minutes feeling that bit more refreshed.'

'It's become very tempting to let good sleep hygiene slide a bit, but that way lies madness so being disciplined is the challenge!'

Daily Routines

'Try to maintain some normality through basic structures, even if everything around you seems to have changed.'

'Make daily lists, crossing them off as achievements':

'During the day I strike through things on the list with a green highlighter pen as I finish them. I feel a sense of achievement of striking through even if it's relatively minor.'

'When I know I am being most effective, my first coffee is a time to think about the daily activities ahead ... my daily list in the notebook is a tentative list of things I would like to achieve. These are usually many and varied but each item may typically take between 5 mins and an hour to achieve ...

... I don't put in too many stressful items. I know I can get quite anxious and stressed, so I usually make sure there is ideally only one but possibly two items to achieve that might particularly stress me. A "big" stressful item may actually get spread over several days to keep my anxiety levels down ...

... Breaking down tasks is important to me and is often the only way I can face doing the activity. If I have a major task, e.g. in the garden, that could take several hours for everything, I would break it down and perhaps do one hour today and an hour at another time, or do an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. Each hour or even half hour, I would just mark on my list as exactly that ... For me, trying to do too much of a work task in one go causes me to mentally wipe out ...

... Critically with the daily list, I don't expect to do them all, and indeed having more things to do enables me to pick and choose a little as I feel during the day. Often the unfinished ones carry to the next day which is great as it makes the following day's list easy. The important thing is I usually write in the first couple of lines things that must be done for the day - else I might put them off indefinitely. These tend to be the more stressful things! ...

... Learning not to put too much on the list came with time, but I now am pretty good at it

... When I have my mini breaks I set my phone to ping me in 10 minutes. "Hey Siri, count down timer 10 minutes" are the group of words I say most during the day! I'll read a book, the newspaper or other relaxing thing.'

'Try and have a few activities planned for the day and stick to them. Even if it's just having a bath or going a walk. I think it helps a wee bit...'

'Food shopping is tricky for me when I hate (and feel stressed in) queues, which are currently virtually impossible to avoid. I keep enough in for several days so I don't have to go out too often. Fortunately there are several supermarkets near me and close together so I can quickly have a run round them all to check which doesn't have the queue a hundred meters long snaking round the car park with people two metres apart!'

'I think day to day, my routine hasn't changed much. I didn't go out much anyway, but I've found that the kind of... mild anxiety I get about the whole thing has me on edge.'

'I think this period of reduced going out and daily things to deal with gives me a chance to think through things and plan the future without the pressure of needing to follow through immediately.'