

# **Spoon Theory**

**A QUICK GUIDE TO  
UNDERSTANDING ENERGY,  
AVOIDING BURNOUT &  
COMMUNICATING YOUR  
NEEDS**



**YOUR STORY**

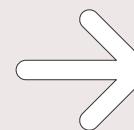


# WHAT IS SPOON THEORY?

Spoon Theory is essentially a pacing system that helps you monitor and manage energy. Using a simple metaphor created by writer Christine Miserandino, it uses 'spoons' to represent units of energy you have for the day.

Every action - getting dressed, answering messages, cooking, driving to work - uses up spoons.

When you run out of spoons you are out of useable energy. Like phone battery bars - once they are gone you need to recharge.



# WHY IS SPOON THEORY HELPFUL?

Spoon Theory can be especially helpful for Neurodivergent adults who may experience chronic fatigue, pain and periods of burnout.

Factors that may contribute to this are sensory overload, co-occurring medical issues and navigating a world not designed for you.

Spoon Theory gives language to the invisible - it can be hard to explain fatigue or overwhelm. Using Spoon Theory can help you communicate your needs to friends and family or co-workers and normalises rest.

Needing downtime is not lazy, it is part of managing energy levels and advocating for yourself.



# WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Often, for the Neurodivergent adult energy is not evenly distributed and can fluctuate. This means that one day you might have a lot of physical energy, but little for focusing on key tasks. Or you may have spoons for socialising, but very few sensory spoons.

This can be frustrating and also cause a lack of understanding from others. Activities that may seem routine can demand significant emotional and cognitive resources and are not always possible.

For example - You feel able to go for a run, but phoning the doctor is out of the question.

**Both demand different types of energy.**



# USING SPOON THEORY

It can be really helpful to work out what spoons you have and in what areas, depending on your fluctuating needs.

Estimate your daily spoons (this can vary depending on sleep, stress, environment, sensory stress, health)

Lets say you have 12 spoons a day.  
Track and Plan - assign spoons to tasks checking your budget. Use a journal, sticky notes, phone app.

For example:

**Shower - 2**

**Grocery Shop - 5**

**Call from work colleague - 3**

**Making lunch - 2**

# DAILY ENERGY MANAGEMENT

**Assess Your Energy:** Check in with yourself before you plan the day.

**Think about what you need to accomplish:** Be realistic about what you need to get done and how it will impact you.

**Consider High Vs Low energy tasks:** Some things are essential and need done, others are a choice, small tasks - if you have enough spoons.

**Track Energy as you go:** Make sure you adjust as the day goes on - it is okay to be flexible and make changes as your energy depletes.

**Factor in Spoon Saving Activities:** it can be helpful to do something restorative during the day to gain a few spoons back i.e a nap, a walk outside, listening to chapter of audiobook.

# TRACK YOUR SPOONS

To build up a better picture of how your spoons are used you can use a daily tracker. This can help you see where spoons are used the most and plan accordingly. A simple table like this is helpful:

T A S K	S P O O N S   U S E D

# WHAT IF I KEEP RUNNING OUT?

Increased anxiety, a change of environment or experiencing an increase in demands can **REALLY** impact your spoons.

It is so important to regularly check in with yourself. Are you pacing your energy or just pushing through? Have you planned to take breaks or are you just winging it?

If your needs are not met or you run out of spoons and continue to operate in deficit with no recovery time - **then you become vulnerable to burnout.**

This is extreme mental and physical fatigue, with an intense heightening of stress and a decrease in your capacity to manage life skills, sensory input or social interactions.

To recover from burnout takes time - extended rest, reduced demands and potentially professional support.

Spoon Theory can help you and others understand how to prioritise your needs, without judgement or criticism.

# SELF- ADVOCATING

It can help to foster empathy and increase awareness of energy management. Others can begin to appreciate the effort involved in seemingly simple tasks and offer support.

You may also start to advocate more for your needs, noticing if you are pacing tasks or planning breaks.

‘Getting others to understand that this is the way you operate might make them a whole lot more understanding when you decline that coffee invitation.’

**Dr Luke Beardon - Managing Anxiety in Autistic Adults**

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Spoon Theory is not about limiting yourself!

It's a helpful framework that makes invisible energy more visible and manageable, so you can plan, rest and thrive in your daily life.

Using Spoon Theory can help you advocate for your own needs and avoid overexertion or burnout.

If you need further support please contact:

[info@yourstorytherapy.org](mailto:info@yourstorytherapy.org)

# THANKYOU.

YOUR STORY