

ND Caregiver's Self-Care Hack Sheet

5 hacks for a brain that's caring for everyone but itself

Landing

Self-care was not designed for your brain. Here's how to hack it. If you're a neurodivergent caregiver, the standard advice – "just take time for yourself," "make a routine," "you deserve rest" – lands somewhere between useless and insulting. Of course you deserve rest. The problem isn't deserving. The problem is that the rest advice assumes a brain that starts, stops, and remembers on demand. Yours doesn't. Neither does mine. This sheet isn't another list of things to feel guilty about not doing. It's five hacks, each with a tool you can actually use – sticky notes, a timer spec, a sensory reboot, a guilt script, and a question to find your person.

- Why self-care advice fails ND caregivers
- 5 hacks, each with an embedded tool
- The ND caregiver mini-kit (waiting-room bag)
- 3 reflection prompts

Why Self-Care Advice Fails ND Caregivers

The wellness industry assumes a brain that works like this:

- You notice you're tired → you decide to rest → you rest → you feel better.

For many ND caregivers, the actual loop looks more like:

- You're running on empty ? you don't notice (interoception is quiet or loud in the wrong way) ? someone or something forces a stop ? you crash ? the guilt arrives ? you "rest" guiltily, which isn't rest at all.

That's not a personal failing. It's a mismatch between the advice and the operating system. Once you know that, you can stop trying to force the wellness routine and start hacking the actual loop. The hack in one line: you can't rely on yourself to notice. So you build a system that notices for you.

Hack 1: Externalize Everything

Your brain cannot be trusted to remember – especially when the load is high. Stop trying. Externalize it instead.

- On your lock screen: a photo of a glass of water, labeled "Drink one. That counts."
- On the fridge: "You haven't eaten in [X] hours. Granola bar is a meal."
- On the bathroom mirror: "You are allowed to be a whole person, not just a caregiver."

Visual anchors bypass the decision part of the brain. Sticky notes don't need to be remembered – they do the remembering for you.

Hack 2: Micro-Dose Your Resets

Three minutes, not thirty. One breath, not meditation. A sip of water, not a hydration goal.

- **1 minute: drink something. Any liquid counts.**
- **1 minute: breathe – in for 4, hold for 7, out for 8. One round is fine.**
- **1 minute: name one thing you can see, one you can hear, one you can feel.**

Set a timer. When it ends, you're done. No app to learn, no streak to keep.

Hack 3: Sensory Regulation Over Self-Improvement

When you're overstimulated, nothing works until you regulate. Not affirmations. Not "one more task." Regulation.

- **Noise-canceling headphones (or earplugs, or a single earbud)**
- **Dim the lights (or close your eyes for 60 seconds)**
- **Cold drink (temperature shift is a fast regulator)**
- **Zero new demands (one existing task can be dropped, no explanation needed)**
- **One grounding object (the weight of a stone, a fidget, a soft thing in your pocket)**

Then, and only then, decide what's next. The reboot isn't the break – it's what makes the break possible.

Hack 4: Outsource the Guilt

This is a symptom of caring, not a symptom of failure.

Oh, there's the guilt again. That's not information about what I'm doing wrong. That's the feeling that shows up when I've been caring for everyone but myself. I don't have to argue with it. I can let it pass.

Name it. Let it pass. Don't argue. Arguing with guilt is how it wins.

Hack 5: Find Your People

One person who won't judge the messy, exhausted, doing-their-best version of you. Online or offline.

- **"Do you ever feel like you're playing a role you didn't audition for?"**
- **"Who's the one person who doesn't judge you when you're at your worst?"**
- **"Can we be each other's check-in – one text, no pressure to reply fast?"**

One person is enough. The goal isn't a village. The goal is one witness who gets it.

The ND Caregiver Mini-Kit

A small bag you can grab on the way out the door. Waiting rooms, hospital halls, long appointments – this is your survival kit.

- **Noise-canceling earbuds (the single highest-value item)**
- **A small comfort object – keychain plush, fidget ring, smooth stone**
- **Sunglasses (hospitals are bright)**
- **Pre-written scripts on your phone (see the NGU Caregiver Notes)**
- **A 3-minute timer app**
- **A snack that doesn't require utensils (you will not remember to eat otherwise)**
- **One photo that reminds you who you are outside of caregiving**
- **A physical list of 3 things you're allowed to say no to today**

Packing it once is the hard part. After that, it's grab-and-go – which is the whole point.

Reflection Prompts

- Which hack felt like permission instead of advice? That's the one to start with.
- What's one thing you could externalize this week that you've been trying to remember?
- Who is the one person who sees the messy version of you and doesn't flinch? What would it take to send them the question from Hack 5?

Keep Close

- A note on the difference: This sheet is for the caregiver context – sensory regulation, waiting rooms, the guilt of caring for others before yourself. If you're also stuck on starting and stopping tasks, the Executive Dysfunction Survival Kit covers that. Both can be true at once. Both are allowed to live on your phone.
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