


What neurodivergent adults want workplaces to know



Many workplaces are set up around one expected way of thinking, communicating, and working. For neurodivergent adults, this can make everyday work more tiring than it looks from the outside.

Autistic and ADHD adults often bring strong skills to their roles. These can include deep focus, creativity, problem-solving, and specialist knowledge. At the same time, standard ways of working can create barriers that others may not notice.

This guide shares what many neurodivergent adults want workplaces to understand. It focuses on practical changes that make work more manageable and fair, without needing big policies or formal labels.



Neurodivergence is not one thing

Neurodivergence is a **broad term**. It includes autism, ADHD, and other differences in how people think, process information, and respond to the world. No two people experience it in the same way.

Some people struggle with focus and organisation. Others are more affected by sensory overload, unpredictability, or social demands. Some find spoken information hard to process in the moment. Others find written instructions confusing if they are vague or open-ended. Many experience a mix, and this can change depending on workload, stress, or environment.

Assumptions cause problems because they flatten these differences. When workplaces expect one **“neurodivergent profile”**, support can miss the mark. An adjustment that helps one person may increase strain for another. For example, more meetings may help one person feel connected, while overwhelming someone else. Written communication may support one person but feel unclear to another if detail is missing.

Effective support starts with **understanding the individual** rather than the label. Asking what helps someone work well is more reliable than relying on general guidance or stereotypes.

Many neurodivergent adults spend a large amount of energy **managing the workplace** itself, not just the job they are hired to do. This effort is often invisible to colleagues and managers.





Where friction shows up most often

Friction at work often comes from small, everyday things rather than big policies. These moments can add up and make the day feel heavier than it needs to be.



Emails are a common example. Messages that are long, vague, or unclear about what is needed can slow work down. When priorities are not stated, people may spend extra time trying to work out what matters most, or worry about getting it wrong.



Meetings can also be difficult. Meetings without an agenda, a clear aim, or a defined end point can be hard to follow and draining. Being asked to think on the spot or respond quickly can put some people at a disadvantage, even when they have good ideas.



Last-minute changes are another source of strain. Sudden shifts in deadlines, plans, or expectations can disrupt focus and increase stress. For some people, this can take time to recover from, even if the change seems small.



The physical environment matters too. Open-plan offices, background noise, bright lights, and frequent interruptions can make it harder to concentrate and stay regulated. These issues are often dismissed as minor, but they can have a real impact on energy and performance.





Small changes that make the biggest difference

Support does not need to be complex to be effective. Small adjustments often reduce strain more than large policies that are hard to use day to day.

Clear communication is one of the most helpful changes. Written instructions, clear priorities, and defined deadlines reduce guesswork. Saying what matters most helps people focus their energy on the right tasks instead of trying to read between the lines.

Predictability also makes a big difference. Sharing agendas before meetings, giving notice of changes, and avoiding last-minute shifts where possible helps people prepare. Even small amounts of notice can reduce stress and support focus.

Choice is just as important. Some people work best in quiet spaces. Others need flexibility in hours or fewer meetings to manage attention. Offering options allows people to work in ways that suit them, rather than forcing everyone into the same setup.

These changes are about removing **unnecessary barriers**. They help people use their skills more fully, without lowering expectations or standards.



What actually reduces strain for neurodivergent brains

For many neurodivergent adults, the main challenge at work is not the task itself. It is the constant effort required to stay regulated, focused, and organised in an environment that keeps changing.

Research shows that autistic and ADHD brains use more energy to manage uncertainty, sensory input, and task switching. This means **strain builds faster**, even when performance looks fine from the outside. What helps most is reducing hidden effort, not increasing motivation.

One of the strongest ways to do this is by **lowering cognitive load**. This means reducing how much information someone has to hold in mind at once. Clear priorities, fewer simultaneous tasks, and visible next steps all reduce the background work the brain must do. This frees up energy for thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.

Predictability also plays a key role. The brain feels safer and works more efficiently when it can anticipate what is coming next. Regular check-ins, shared agendas, and stable expectations reduce the need for constant monitoring and adjustment. Even small amounts of predictability can lower stress and improve focus.

Another important factor is **recovery time**. Neurodivergent adults often need more time to reset after meetings, interruptions, or sensory demand. Allowing short gaps between meetings, protecting focus time, or avoiding back-to-back tasks supports nervous system regulation and reduces overload.

These changes work because they align with how the brain manages energy and attention. They do not lower standards or expectations. They remove **unnecessary drain**, making it easier for people to do the work they are already capable of doing well.





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At HealthHero, we often speak to neurodivergent adults who are performing well on paper but feel drained by the way work is set up around them. Many spend a lot of energy managing emails, meetings, noise, changes, and unspoken expectations, rather than the work itself. This extra effort is rarely visible and is often missed in reviews or conversations. When small adjustments are made early, strain drops and people can use their strengths more fully. You do not need a label or a problem to ask for change. Noticing where work feels harder than it should is often the right place to start.

What managers can do that actually helps

If you manage people, these are some of the most effective ways to reduce strain without lowering standards:



Reduce how much needs to be held in mind

Be clear about priorities, next steps, and deadlines.
Avoid giving several vague tasks at once.



Increase predictability where you can

Share agendas, give notice of changes, and keep expectations steady across similar tasks.



Protect energy, not just time

Avoid back-to-back meetings where possible.
Allow short gaps to reset after high-demand work.



Focus on outcomes, not constant visibility

Be clear about what good work looks like, rather than how or when it must be done.



Ask what helps, not what's wrong

Simple questions about working preferences often lead to better adjustments than assumptions.



If you only change one thing

If you are not sure where to start, **focus on clarity.**

Unclear expectations cause more strain than most people realise. When tasks, priorities, or deadlines are vague, neurodivergent adults often spend extra time trying to work out what is really expected. This can slow work down and increase anxiety, even when someone is highly capable.

Being clear about what needs to be done, by when, and what matters most reduces this hidden effort straight away. It helps people plan their time, manage focus, and feel more confident in their work.

Better ways to communicate and give feedback

Clear communication helps everyone, but it is especially important for neurodivergent adults. Ambiguous messages, mixed signals, or implied expectations can create stress and slow work down.



Being specific makes a big difference. Clear goals, concrete examples, and defined deadlines reduce uncertainty. If priorities change, saying so directly helps people adjust without second-guessing what they should be doing.



Feedback works best when it is **clear and timely**. Vague comments can be hard to interpret and may leave people unsure what to change. Saying what is working well, alongside what needs to be different, supports learning without adding anxiety.



Written follow-up can also help. A short summary after meetings or feedback conversations gives people time to process information in their own way and refer to it later.



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Making space for different ways of working

People do their best work in different ways. Some need quiet and long periods of focus. Others work better with clear time blocks or frequent check-ins. Allowing for this difference can make work more manageable for neurodivergent adults.

Reducing interruptions can help many people concentrate. This might mean protecting focus time, limiting unnecessary meetings, or agreeing when messages need an immediate response and when they do not.

Flexibility in how tasks are done also matters. Breaking work into smaller steps, using clear timelines, or allowing work to be completed in different orders can support focus and follow-through.

It can also help to look at **how performance is measured**. Focusing on outcomes rather than constant visibility or presence reduces pressure and supports different working styles. This allows people to meet expectations in ways that suit how they think and work.



Talking about needs without pressure to disclose

Not every neurodivergent adult wants to share a diagnosis at work. Some may not have one. Others may worry about stigma, being treated differently, or their competence being questioned. Support should not depend on formal disclosure.

Conversations work best when they focus on needs rather than labels. Asking what helps someone work well keeps the discussion practical and respectful. It also avoids making assumptions about what support might be required.

This can sound like:

- *“Is there anything that would make this task easier to manage?”*
- *“How do you prefer to get information or feedback?”*
- *“Would a different setup help you focus better?”*

When these questions are asked routinely, not just in response to difficulty, support feels like part of good management rather than a special request. This reduces pressure and makes it easier for people to speak up early.

Why this support helps everyone

Supporting neurodivergent adults is not only about individual adjustments. Many of the changes that reduce strain for neurodivergent staff also improve work for the wider team.

Clear communication reduces mistakes and rework. Predictable schedules lower stress and help people plan their time. Flexible working supports energy, focus, and balance across different roles and life stages.

When support is offered early, problems are less likely to build. **Small changes** can prevent burnout, long-term absence, or people feeling pushed out of roles they are capable of doing well.

Making these practices part of everyday work creates a more sustainable workplace. It helps people stay engaged, productive, and well over time.



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All information correct
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How HealthHero can help

Supporting neurodivergent adults at work can raise questions for both employees and managers. Getting the right support early can make a real difference.

With **HealthHero**, neurodivergent adults can book an online GP appointment to talk about focus, energy, stress, sleep, or work-related strain. Appointments are designed to fit around working life, with time to explore what has been difficult and what might help.

We also support managers and teams with guidance around workplace adjustments and wellbeing support. Acting early can help prevent problems from building and support people to stay well and effective at work.