Spoon Theory

Let’s talk about it

Spoon theory is a way to explain living with limited energy. A writer named Christine Miserandino created it to describe chronic illness, but the neurodivergent community uses it a lot now.

Imagine you start the day with twelve spoons, but a colleague might start with twenty. Every single task costs spoons, like getting dressed or answering an email. However, a task that takes one spoon for you might take four spoons for someone else. Once you're out of spoons, you've got no energy left for anything else. You can sometimes borrow spoons from tomorrow if you really need to, but that leaves you at serious risk of burnout.

This concept is helpful because it shows how everyday tasks drain us in different ways. For neurodivergent people, things like sensory overload or masking can steal multiple spoons at once. The theory gives people a simple way to communicate when they've got nothing left to give.

Everyone should be able to manage their energy without shame. You can help support your team by respecting when a colleague says they're 'low on spoons'. It's also best to keep meetings short so you don't drain someone's entire supply. Please remember that energy levels change from day to day.

Useful links

- Spoon theory: Understanding energy for neurodivergent people
- Spoon Theory for Autism and ADHD: The Neurodivergent Spoon Drawer
- Energy accounting: a strategy for supporting wellbeing