

# DRIVE YOUR SELF WELL

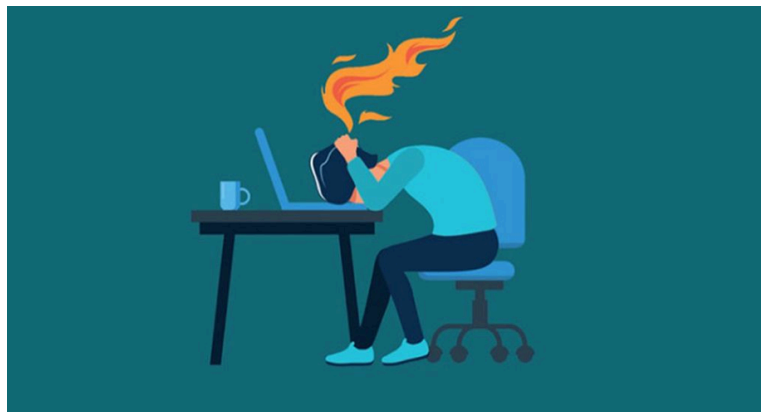


Welcome to your mental health MOT. No, not the garage kind. This is your brain we're talking about — the most complex biological machine on the planet. And just like a car, your mind needs regular checks and sometimes, a full service.

Whether you're cruising, stuck in traffic, or feel like you've broken down on the M25 of life, this guide is your glovebox manual for understanding, maintaining, and driving your *Self* well.

## Burnout: The Engine Warning Light

Burnout is on the rise. In 2025, 83% of 25–34-year-olds reported experiencing burnout symptoms, with 29% needing time off work due to symptoms. This age group is particularly vulnerable due to career pressure, digital overload, and economic uncertainties.



There's a big difference between short-term stress and chronic stress. Short-term stress can actually be helpful — it sharpens your focus and gets you through a tough moment. But when stress becomes chronic, when your body and brain are stuck in high-alert mode for too long, it starts to take a serious toll.

Over time, chronic stress can lead to:

- Ongoing fatigue, no matter how much rest you get
- Frequent colds or slower recovery from illness
- A flat or irritable mood
- Trouble concentrating or thinking clearly

This is what we call **Burnout**: a state of physical, emotional, and cognitive exhaustion. It's not just "being a bit tired." Burnout is real, and it has real consequences. Left unaddressed, it's linked to heart problems, immune dysfunction, anxiety, depression, and more.

The good news? Your brain is *changeable*. Thanks to something called neuroplasticity, you have the ability to shift out of burnout — not overnight, but with consistent, proactive steps. And when it comes to health, proactive is almost always better than a reactive strategy.

## Neuroplasticity: Recalibrating Your Internal Sat Nav

MRI studies show that just 8–12 weeks of consistent mental training can lead to measurable changes in the brain. Neuroplasticity — your brain's ability to adapt and rewire — is like updating your car's GPS.

You wouldn't expect your sat nav to remember a new route after just one drive. It takes repetition for the system to recalibrate. Similarly, with regular practice, your brain begins to favour healthier pathways — gradually steering you toward greater calm, resilience, and fulfilment.



## Your Nervous System: The Car's Pedals

Your autonomic nervous system is like the pedals of a car. It's split into two branches:

- **Sympathetic (accelerator):** Speeds you up — fight or flight.
- **Parasympathetic (brake):** Slows you down — rest and digest.



Stress isn't the enemy — **chronic stress** is. Short-term stress can be helpful. But constant foot-on-the-gas pressure leads to burnout. You need to switch gears.

# The Mental Health MOT

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Just like your car needs regular checks, so does your mind. **Ask yourself:**

- What gear do I spend most of my time in?
- Am I fueling myself well — rest, food, joy?
- Is my emotional oil light on?
- Do I feel connected — to people, purpose, pleasure?

## Three Emotional Systems: Threat, Drive, Soothe

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Your brain operates across three emotional regulation systems (Paul Gilbert):

### 1. Threat (Speeding away from danger):

- Purpose: Detect and reduce risk of harm.
- Overuse = anxiety, hypervigilance.
- Rebuild with: high-protein fuel (stabilises blood sugar and supports neurotransmitter production), movement, meditation.

### 2. Drive (Forward Momentum):

- Purpose: Seek rewards and goals.
- Overuse = dopamine burnout, addiction patterns.
- Rebuild with: value-aligned goal setting, cold exposure, purpose-led tasks.

### 3. Soothe (Cruise Control):

- Purpose: Restore and connect.
- Overuse = stagnation, avoidance.
- Rebuild with: warm water, breathwork, co-regulation (connection).

**Balance is the skill.** Learn to switch gears depending on what life is asking of you.



## Taking the Wheel of Life:

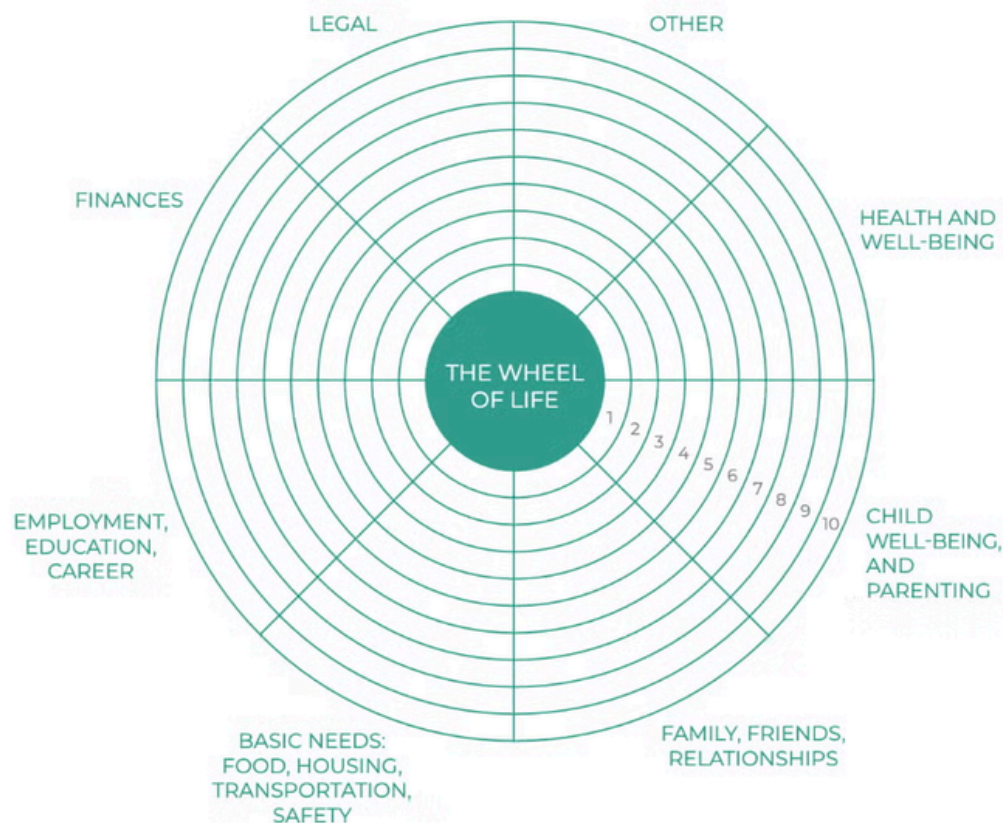
Forget influencers and productivity gurus – you’ve got to find your **own** way.

### Instead, ask:

- When do I feel my best?
- What wake-up time, sleep schedule, nutrition, and exercise support me?
- When in life did I feel most balanced?
- How much activity does my social battery allow?
- What are my ideal working days / hours?

You can try this Wheel of Life exercise below if you want to - the idea is to review your level of satisfaction in each domain from 0-10 (10 being the highest). This provides you with a really clear visual of any imbalances, skews and areas you may wish to invest more or less energy into. The skew will change depending on different life stages and contexts - there isn't a 'right or wrong' way to map this. I invite you to look at your wheel and notice what thoughts, feelings and ideas come up.

**When it comes to burnout, proactive strategies are about making changes in BOTH your internal and external worlds. We have a responsibility to ourselves to design a life that our particular nervous system can cope with.**



## Building a Toolbox: Daily Rhythm Support

Everyone has their own ‘biting point’ in life where they feel balanced, energised and capable to manage the demands that come their way. I’m not suggesting everyone should design their day in the same way. I’m offering a template for a daily protocol, summarised through the science, that can help tap into your biological and psychological systems. Play around with it.

### AM: Use the Cortisol Spike



That anxious feeling in the morning? It’s natural — cortisol spikes to help you wake up. In the morning, you can hijack the kick start of the threat system:

- Move gently (stretch, walk).
- Get **sunlight in your eyes** early.
- Delay caffeine if you're prone to anxiety (myth busting: the 90minute window has since been debunked). **A high protein breakfast** will help regulate your blood sugar through the rest of the day.
- **Get started** - the longer you avoid the day, the more anxious you will become. See if you can tick off even small tasks like taking a shower.

## Midday: Keep the Engine Running

Motivation dips post-lunch. Hack your **drive system**:

- Set 3 goals max.
- Use the **Pomodoro technique** (25 mins focus, 5 mins rest).
- Get some movement.
- Remind yourself of your **intrinsic source of motivation: why** you are doing what you're doing.

## PM: Press the Brake Pedal

Wind down with intent:

- **Consistent bed and wake time** where you can - even on weekends (although you're not a machine, loosen it when you need to).
- Try the breathing exercises above.
- Take a hot bath or shower.
- Keep pen and paper by the bed to brain-dump.
- Avoid caffeine around 6 hours before bed (due to its longer half-life, but everyone metabolises slightly differently).



## Final Note: Foundations First

You don't need a new productivity system. You need rhythm, routine, and restoration.

Master the basics. Drive consciously. Find your own biting point. This is how you drive your Self well — not for the next week, but for life. Everything you need to make a start is in this sheet. All you have to do, is stick to it.

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# Want to hear more?

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