This article was supposed to be written weeks ago, a month ago even. I knew when it was due to be finished months before that. The actual writing process prior to finishing it will have happened astonishingly close to when it will get sent to, hopefully, be published. This is my writing method more often than not, that is, when I actually get something written. This is due primarily to my executive dysfunction.

Executive dysfunction might not be a term familiar to many in the Spina Bifida community, at least not as familiar as other medical terms we use more frequently in our daily lives. But it's as important to be aware of and knowledgeable about executive dysfunction as it is Hydrocephalus and shunts. Executive dysfunction refers to deficits in or the inability to carry out execution functioning processes. These processes cover a broad spectrum, mainly dealing with planning and carrying out tasks, organization and goal orientation. Executive dysfunction is also referred to as executive functioning disorder. It was linked initially primarily with ADHD and similar diagnoses, but has also been proven to be prevalent in people who have Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus.

Inability to complete tasks quickly or effectively focus attention on a task can often result in frustration and heightened levels of anxiety and stress. This can somewhat be alleviated by creating schedules and lists in order to complete tasks. For children, including them in creating these plans not only breaks down the process of a task for them, it gives them a a sense of accomplishment at the start. It can also be helpful to switch off tasks or take breaks in the middle of working on something. These and other tips and resources can be found online; there have also been several books written on the subject of executive dysfunction.

In managing executive functioning issues, it is also important to remember the common connection between executive dysfunction and depression/other mental health diagnoses. Dealing with these mental health issues could very well result in added stress which could negatively affect executive functioning. Therefore if navigating execution dysfunction, either apart from or compounded by other mental health issues, whatever skills and tactics that have been developed become even more important. So too will the self care practices being used to manage and improve your mental health.

Self care, as has been mentioned in previous articles, can encompass a wide variety of activities from hygiene and chores to social activities to hobbies. It is therefore easy and often natural for practices in place to reinforce executive functioning to mesh with self care activities. In this way managing your mental health and building up executive functioning can be accomplished at the same time.

I do want to make a point of saying that sometimes schedules and lists and timers might not be enough to work through executive dysfunction. Sometimes your struggles to deal with your mental health may mean that self care is even harder than usual. Sometimes the two feed into each other; mental health impacts executive dysfunction impacts mental health and round and round it goes. That can be really frustrating, but that's ok; it won't last. In the meantime do what you can, focus on self care and doing what you need to do for you. Neurodivergence is different yes, difficult occasionally, rarely ever deadly.