Buckets for Brains (A comic about burnout and cognitive load) – text and image description

Please note that there is one swear word in this comic – sh\*t

# Page 1

## Page 1, Frame 1:

Text: Sometimes I go through these periods where my brain just seems to malfunction.

ID: Three women stand holding mugs of coffee. The women on the left and right are chatting cheerfully, but the one in the middle looks tired and disengaged. She has dark brown hair, glasses, and blue t-shirt.

## Page 1, Frame 2:

Text: It becomes hard to think or focus. Everything feels hard, and I just want to sleep.

ID: The dark-haired woman from the first panel is sitting slumped over a desk with a laptop on it.

## Page 1, Frame 3:

Text: It feels stupid. It’s difficult to explain why it takes so little to break my brain. But over the years I’ve come up with what I call the “bucket theory”.

ID: Three differently-shaped buckets – purple, red and yellow.

## Page 1, Frame 4:

Text: Imagine everyone has an invisible bucket on their heads (bear with me on this).

ID: Three people wander about minding their own business. Each one has a bucket attached to the top of their heads.

# Page 2

## Page 2, Frame 1:

Text: The bucket represents your capacity for cognitive load – basically how much stuff you can fit into your head at the one time.

ID: A big blue bucket

## Page 2, Frame 2:

Text: Your bucket fills up with all the tasks you need to do, or things you need to remember.

ID: A view of the top of the bucket from the last frame. Five taps are pouring water into it, each labelled differently:

* Don’t forget gran’s birthday
* Send that report by the end of the day
* Finish that big project
* Remember to take the bins out
* Emails to answer

## Page 2, Frame 3:

Text: But there’s all the background sensory input. It seems like nothing at first, but it adds up.

ID: Raindrops fall into the bucket. Each is labelled with some sensory input or stressor:

* 532 types of bread at the shop
* Colours
* Traffic noise
* Fluorescent lights
* People
* Scary things on the news
* That itchy label in your t-shirt
* Social interaction
* Loud talking

## Page 2, Frame 4:

Text: Not all buckets are equal though. Some people’s buckets are roomy, while others hardly hold anything. Some are narrow and hard to fill, others are open to catch everything. Some buckets have inbuilt drainage systems; others need to be bailed out with a spoon. Some buckets have fancy covers that keep out the rain.

ID: The text is illustrated with pictures of buckets that match the descriptions.

# Page 3

## Page 3, Frame 1:

Text: If your bucket fills up too much and overflows, it gets all up in your circuitry. Your brain short-circuits like a phone dropped in a puddle.

ID: A woman with a bucket attached to her head. The bucket overflows and drips down onto her. Her eyes have turned into spirals, and shock marks spark off of her.

## Page 3, Frame 2:

Text: It doesn’t take much to overload my brain. My bucket is so small that it’s basically always full.

ID: reads: A cross-section drawing of a very shallow bucket, full nearly to the brim with water. The water is apportioned into different sections, with various labels:

* Oh shit, Mother’s Day
* Writing applications for my practice
* Writing applications for Neuk
* Remembering meds
* Remembering deadlines
* Trying to actually make some art
* Learning a skill I really need
* Answering emails
* Writing copy
* Managing appointments
* Budgets
* Other people’s scheduling and admin
* Domestic obligations
* Volunteering
* Caring for cats
* Caring for grandparents
* Writing that workshop proposal
* Meetings
* Keeping track of everything
* Anxiety

The last two sections are the largest.

## Page 3, Frame 3:

Text: I have no way of filtering out the world. My brain fills up with all the background “stuff” – noise, light, smells, tastes and textures.

ID: A head and shoulders view of the dark-haired woman from earlier in the comic. She looks up at the shallow bucket on her head, which has a tiny rain cloud above it, raining water into it.

## Page 3, Frame 4:

Text: Sometimes it doesn’t even need to be something outside of me. My anxiety grows of its own accord and there’s less room for other stuff (somehow, making art is always the first thing to be pushed out).

ID: The shallow bucket cross-section from before, but now the anxiety section has grown, and pushed out some of the other sections (answering emails, oh shit Mother’s Day, writing apps for my own practice, remembering deadlines, remembering meds, learning a new skill, and trying to actually make art).

# Page 4

## Page 4, Frame 1:

Text: Whatever the cause, there comes a point where I reach overload and the circuitry of my brain shorts out.

ID: The dark haired woman’s bucket has overflowed and soaked her. Her eyes have turned to spirals and shocked sparks fly off her.

## Page 4, Frame 2:

Text: I start losing track of time, forgetting things, making stupid mistakes. Nothing gets done and I can’t snap myself out of it. It’s like thinking through static.

ID: In the top right corner is a drawing of various bits of work – an email, a to-do list, a letter, a big calendar page. In the bottom left corner is the dark haired woman from the nose up. Her eyes are still spirals, and there is a cutaway to where her brain would be – but it’s just static.

## Page 4, Frame 3:

Text: For me, prolonged rest is the neurological equivalent of putting your wet phone in rice. You just have to hope it will start working again once it’s finally dried out.

ID: The dark-haired woman, eyes still spirals, lies in a Ziploc bag of rice, her little hands pressed against the side.

## Page 4, Frame 4:

Text: It’s never quite the same afterwards, though, and I worry that the day is coming when no amount of drying out will be able to fix me.

ID: The dark-haired woman is pinned out on a washing line, alongside a t-shirt and jeans. Her expression is morose.