

## Dealing With Burnout

Whether you recognize the warning signs of impending burnout or you're already past the breaking point, trying to push through the exhaustion and continuing as you have been will only cause further emotional and physical damage. There are positive steps you can take to get your life back into balance and overcome burnout.

### **Burnout prevention and recovery tip**

#### *1: Seek social support to manage stress*

When you're on the road to burnout, you can feel helpless. But you have a lot more control over stress than you may think. The most effective way to relieve stress is to reach out to others. Social contact is nature's antidote to stress. Since the face and heart are wired together in the brain, talking face to face with a good listener can help to quickly calm your nervous system and relieve stress. The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to "fix" your stressors; they just have to be a good listener, someone who'll listen attentively without being distracted or judging you. Opening up won't make you a burden to others. In fact, most friends and loved ones will be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only strengthen your friendship.

Try to be more sociable with your coworkers. Developing friendships with people you work with can help buffer you from job burnout. When you take a break, for example, instead of directing your attention to your smart phone, try engaging your colleagues, or schedule social events together after work. If you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, it's never too late to build new friendships and expand your social network.

The power of giving:

Being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure and can help to significantly reduce stress as well as broaden your social circle. While it's important not to take on too much when you're facing burnout, helping others doesn't have to involve a lot of time or effort. Even small things like a kind word or friendly smile can help lower stress—for you and the other person.

#### *2: Get moving*

Even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing when you're burned out, exercise is a powerful antidote to stress and burnout. It's also something you can do right now to boost your mood. Aim to exercise for 30 minutes or more per day—or break that up into short, 10-minute bursts of activity. A 10-minute walk can improve your mood for two hours.

Rhythmic exercise—where you move both your arms and legs—is a hugely effective way to lift your mood, increase energy, sharpen focus, and relax both the mind and body. Try walking, running, weight training, swimming, martial arts, or even dancing.

To maximize stress relief, instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts, focus on your body and how it feels as you move—the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, for example, or the wind on your skin.

#### *3: Reframe the way you look at work*

Whether you have a job that leaves you rushed off your feet or one that is monotonous and unfulfilling, the most effective way to combat job burnout is to quit and find a job you love instead.

Of course, for many of us changing jobs or careers is far from being a practical solution—we're grateful just to have work to pay the bills. Whatever your situation, though, there are still things you can do to improve your state of mind.

Try to find some value in what you do. Even in some mundane jobs, you can often focus on how what you do helps others, for example, or provides a much needed product or service. Focus on aspects of the job that you do enjoy—even if it's just chatting with your coworkers at lunch. Changing your attitude towards your job can help you regain a sense of purpose and control.

Find balance in your life. If you hate your job, look for meaning and satisfaction elsewhere in your life: in your family, friends, or hobbies. Focus on the parts of your life that bring you joy.

Make friends at work. Having strong ties in the workplace can help reduce monotony and counter the effects of burnout. Having friends to chat and joke with during the day can help relieve stress from an unfulfilling or demanding job, improve your job performance, or simply get you through a rough day.

Take time off. If burnout seems inevitable, try to take a complete break from work. Go on vacation, use up your sick days, ask for a temporary leave-of-absence—anything to remove yourself from the situation. Use the time away to recharge your batteries and pursue other burnout recovery steps.

#### *4: Eat a healthy diet*

What you put in your body can have a huge impact on your mood and energy levels throughout the day.

Minimize sugar and refined carbs. You may crave sugary snacks or comfort foods such as pasta or fries, but these high-carbohydrate foods quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy. Reduce your intake of foods that can adversely affect your mood, such as caffeine, trans fats, and foods with high levels of chemical preservatives or hormones. Eat more Omega-3 fatty acids to give your mood a boost. The best sources are fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines), seaweed, flaxseed, and walnuts.

Avoid nicotine. Smoking when you're feeling stressed may seem calming, but nicotine is a powerful stimulant, leading to higher, not lower, levels of anxiety. Drink alcohol in moderation. One or 2 standards per day and at least 2 days a week not drinking. Alcohol temporarily reduces worry, but too much can cause anxiety as it wears off.

#### *5: Reevaluate priorities*

Burnout is an undeniable sign that something important in your life is not working. Take time to think about your hopes, goals, and dreams. Are you neglecting something that is truly important to you? Burnout can be an opportunity to rediscover what really makes you happy and to slow down and give yourself time to rest, reflect, and heal.

Set boundaries. Don't overextend yourself. Learn how to say "no" to requests on your time. If you find this difficult, remind yourself that saying "no" allows you to say "yes" to the things that you truly want to do.

Take a daily break from technology. Set a time each day when you completely disconnect. Put away your laptop, turn off your phone, and stop checking email.

Nourish your creative side. Creativity is a powerful antidote to burnout. Try something new, start a fun project, or resume a favourite hobby. Choose activities that have nothing to do with work.

Set aside relaxation time. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response.

Get plenty of sleep. Feeling tired can exacerbate burnout by causing you to think irrationally. Keep your cool in stressful situations by getting a good night's sleep.

Boost your ability to stay on task. If you are having trouble staying on task and dealing with your symptoms others need to be involved in your recovery program.

Learn how to reduce stress in the moment.

Manage troublesome thoughts and feelings.

Motivate yourself to take the steps that can relieve stress and burnout.

Improve your relationships at work and home.

Rediscover joy and meaning that make work—and life—worthwhile.

Increase your overall health and happiness.

Authors: Melinda Smith, M.A., Jeanne Segal, Ph.D., Lawrence Robinson, and Robert Segal, M.A.

Never be afraid to seek outside support, there is a certain point where our coping and cognitive skills are no longer effective and we will need assistance from others; sometimes professionals.