

## Stress/ Burnout – Brown out

- Burnout Prevention and Recovery
- Signs, Symptoms, and Coping Strategies for Mental Exhaustion
- Preventing Burnout

If constant stress has you feeling disillusioned, helpless, and completely exhausted, you may be suffering from burnout/brownout. When you're burned out from stress, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks bleak, and it's difficult to muster up the energy to care—let alone do something about your situation.

Depression and exhaustion symptoms are sometimes easily confused and require accurate diagnosis from a competent professional.

The unhappiness and detachment that burnout causes can threaten your job, your relationships, and your health. But burnout can be overcome. There are plenty of things you can do to regain your balance and start to feel hopeful and positive again.

What is burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place.

Burnout reduces productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, you may feel like you have nothing more to give.

Most of us have days when we feel bored, overloaded, or unappreciated, when dragging ourselves out of bed requires the determination of Hercules. If you feel like this most of the time, however, you may have burnout.

Perhaps you feel like you have Friday energy levels on Monday or Tuesday.

**You may be on the road to burnout if:**

- Every day is a bad day.
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a total waste of energy.
- You're exhausted all the time.
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming.
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated.

The effects of burnout:

The negative effects of burnout spill over into every area of life—including your home, work, and social life. Burnout can also cause long-term changes to your body that make you vulnerable to illnesses like colds and flu. The immune system goes down. Because of its many consequences, it's important to deal with burnout right away.

The difference between stress and burnout:

Burnout may be the result of unrelenting stress, but it isn't the same as too much stress. Stress, by and large, involves too much- too many pressures that demand too much of you physically and

psychologically. Stressed people can still imagine, though, that if they can just get everything under control, they'll feel better.

Burnout, on the other hand, is about not enough. Being burned out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often don't see any hope of positive change in their situations. While you're usually aware of being under a lot of stress, you don't always notice burnout when it happens.

## Stress vs. Burnout

### Stress

- Characterized by over engagement
- Emotions are over-reactive
- Produces urgency and hyperactivity
- Loss of energy
- Leads to anxiety disorders
- Primary damage is physical
- Shortens life

Stress is not felt, it's perceived and interpreted. It's a construct made up of a cocktail of emotions: conflict – leads to sadness, pressure – leads to anxiety, frustration – leads to anger. It's the interpretation of these emotions which we conclude "oh, I'm stressed".

### Burnout

- Characterized by disengagement
- Emotions are blunted
- Produces helplessness and hopelessness
- Loss of motivation, ideas, and hope
- Leads to detachment and depression
- Primary damage is emotional
- May make life seem not worth living
- Burnout is the end result of stress – when the system finally starts to shut down

Burnout seems to have a seductive nature. It is characterised by low lows, a feeling of complete overwhelm and not coping. Our brain chemistry compensates for this, releasing feel-goods, we feel on top of the world and perhaps overestimate our abilities and resilience only to slump again later. The slumps become deeper and deeper.

### Burnout Causes

Burnout often stems from your job. Anyone who feels overworked and undervalued is at risk for burnout—from the hardworking office worker who hasn't had a vacation in years, to the frazzled stay-at-home mum struggling to care for kids, housework, and an aging parent.

Your lifestyle and personality traits can also contribute to burnout. What you do in your downtime and how you look at the world can play just as big of a role in causing burnout as work or home demands.

### **Work-related causes of burnout**

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work
- Lack of recognition or reward for good work
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations
- Doing work that's monotonous or unchallenging
- Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment

### **Lifestyle causes of burnout**

- Working too much, without enough time for socializing or relaxing
- Lack of close, supportive relationships
- Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others
- Not getting enough sleep

### **Personality traits can contribute to burnout**

- Perfectionistic tendencies; nothing is ever good enough
- Pessimistic view of yourself and the world
- The need to be in control; reluctance to delegate to others
- High-achieving, Type A personality

Burnout is a gradual process that occurs over an extended period of time. The signs and symptoms of burnout are subtle at first, but they get worse and worse as time goes on. Think of the early symptoms of burnout as warning signs or red flags that something is wrong that needs to be addressed. If you pay attention to these early warning signs, you can prevent a major breakdown. We need to act when the symptoms 1<sup>st</sup> emerge and not wait until true burnout arrives. If you ignore them, you'll eventually burn out and recovery becomes more difficult.

### **Physical signs and symptoms of burnout:**

- Feeling tired and drained most of the time
- Lowered immunity, feeling sick a lot
- Frequent headaches, back pain, muscle aches
- Change in appetite or sleep habits
- Emotional signs and symptoms of burnout
- Sense of failure and self-doubt
- Feeling helpless, trapped, and defeated
- Detachment, feeling alone in the world
- Loss of motivation
- Increasingly cynical and negative outlook
- Decreased satisfaction and sense of accomplishment
- Behavioural signs and symptoms of burnout
- Withdrawing from responsibilities
- Isolating yourself from others
- Procrastinating, taking longer to get things done
- Using food, drugs, or alcohol to cope
- Taking out your frustrations on others
- Skipping work or coming in late and leaving early