

You've had your morning coffee (or coffees) and you still don't feel up to tackling those emails. If constant stress has you feeling completely exhausted, helpless, and slightly disillusioned, you may be on the bumpy road to burnout. When you're burned out, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks grim, and it can be difficult to muster up the energy to even care. Maybe you even have an upcoming vacation to look forward to, but these last few days at the office seem damn near impossible to get through. Most of us have days when we feel powerless, overloaded, or unappreciated. When dragging ourselves out of bed requires the determination of Hercules. This sadness and detachment can threaten your job, your relationships and most importantly your health. Turns out, burnout is now officially recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an "occupational Phenomenon". In other words, there may be a legitimate reason, and not just lack of caffeine or motivation for feeling like you just can't work another second. By recognizing the early symptoms and warning signs you can hopefully prevent it. Or, if you've already hit the breaking point, there are plenty of things you can do to regain your balance and begin to see the light, feeling positive and hopeful once again.

If you said you were suffering from burnout in the 1970's you might have raised an eyebrow or two. At the time the term was used informally to describe the side effect of heavy drug use. Today burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, ineffectiveness in the workplace, and by chronic negative responses to stressful workplace conditions. WHO officials add that burn out can be defined by three dimensions, increased mental distance from one's job, feelings of negativism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. While not considered a mental illness, burnout can be considered a mental issue and refers specifically in the "occupational context" and should not be used to describe experiences and feelings in other areas of life. More specifically, burn out is a syndrome tied to chronic workplace stress the has not been successfully managed. The negative side effects can however spill over into every area of life, including your home, work, and social life. Burnout can also cause changes in your health. Making you

vulnerable to illnesses. Because of its many consequences, it is important to deal with burnout immediately.

Is it burnout or stress? There is a difference, but sometimes it can be hard to know. It may require taking a big step back to evaluate the overall picture. Paying attention is important.

**Stress symptoms include:**

- Over-engagement
- Over-reactive emotions
- Urgency & Hyperactivity
- Anxiety
- Primary damage – physical

**Burnout symptoms include:**

- Disengagement
- Blunted emotions
- Helplessness & hopelessness
- Detachment
- Primary damage – emotional



According to the American Institute of Stress, we spend 8% more time working today than we did 20 years ago, for an average of 47 hours/week. Additionally, 40% of workers confess that their job is high stress and 26% feel burned out by their job. So how can we manage the heavier workload without losing our minds?

For starters you can hit the gym! A 2017 study revealed that exercise can help prevent or even reverse the effects of burnout. A weekly work out program is an effective burnout intervention. It may seem counterintuitive to leave work in order to work out, but exercise is crucial to your mental and physical health. Regular exercise reduces levels of stress, improves self-confidence, prevents cognitive decline, increases productivity, and improves memory. The satisfaction of knowing you're taking

care of yourself, and the improved energy you'll get from getting up and moving rather than sitting stationary at a desk all day, will help prevent that physical and emotional exhaustion that causes burnout. Different types of exercise may assist in different ways. Try a well-rounded exercise program that includes stretching, strength training, and cardio. Organization's and workplaces wishing to proactively reduce burnout can do so by encouraging their employees to access regular exercise programs. So, don't skip out on that Zumba class today.

While burnout stems from your job it is not caused solely by stressful work or too many responsibilities. Other factors contribute to burnout, including lifestyle. In fact, what you do in your downtime and how you perceive the world can play just as impactful of a role in causing overwhelming stress as work or home demands. When you're not at work, you need to disconnect ... for real. Thinking about work outside of the office and even on your day off is a major burnout indicator. Your body gives you many signs it's under stress: neck tightening, headaches, stomach pains. If those feelings are accompanying negative thoughts about your job, you could be burning out. Is your glass half-empty or half-full? How you answer this age-old question about positive thinking may reflect your outlook on life, your attitude toward yourself, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic. Studies have shown that optimism or the expectation of positive outcomes might lead to experiencing less stress.

Get more sleep. This can be easier said than done since anxiety and stress can keep you up. But adequate rest is essential to getting your body back on track. Feeling tired can exacerbate burnout by causing you to think irrationally. You need good quality sleep to help return to your baseline and recharge and get back to work functioning at pre-burnout levels.

Just say no. When the demands others make on us become overwhelming, drawing boundaries is crucial. Saying "no", "not today", or "sorry, I can't" never comes easy. We all grant friends, family members, acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours and many others our time and attention without realizing how overstretched we already are. We never want to disappoint. But, accepting new responsibilities well forgetting about the ones we already have is a recipe for exhaustion. Take a

moment to recognize when you may have stretched yourself too thin, get your priorities inline. Calmly communicating your needs can be empowering.



Try being more sociable with your coworkers. Developing friendships with people you work with can help buffer you from job burnout. Human beings are hardwired to be social creatures. We are built to crave contact with other people and thrive with coworkers who support each other. This makes sense, the employee who associates his or her job with good relationships and positive experiences will be more eager to work than the employee with no friends and high levels of stress. When you take a break, for example, instead of directing your attention to your smart phone, try engaging with colleagues. Go for a walk. Ask about their weekend plans. It takes time and effort to maintain social connections, but supportive people are the best inoculation against burnout.

Burnout is an undeniable sign that something important in your life isn't working. If you feel like you might be close joining the burnout club, take a step back to figure out what's wrong, and let yourself off the hook. Understanding the issue, recognizing workplace factors, being aware of signs and symptoms and taking proactive steps for prevention can help reduce or even eliminate burnout. Take time to think about your hopes, goals, and dreams. This can be an opportunity to rediscover what really makes you happy.

July 2019