

Neurodiversity at work: preventing burnout and maintaining positive wellbeing

People may experience burnout from time to time after periods of prolonged stress. However, there are steps that you can take to prevent this. Read on to find out about the causes and symptoms of burnout, and what you can do to prevent yourself from burning out at work and maintain your wellbeing.

What is burnout?

Burnout occurs because of prolonged stress levels and can negatively impact a person's physical and mental health. Work-related burnout (also known as occupational burnout) can also contribute to decreased job satisfaction, having to take time off work, and wanting to resign from your role¹.

Neurodiverse individuals are also at risk of occupational burnout, and it is important to understand ways in which you can prevent this and reduce levels of work-related stress.

Causes of burnout

Occupational burnout has many causes, but some of the main causes are emotional exhaustion, taking on too much work at once², and poor sleep or nutrition³.

For neurodiverse individuals, sensory or emotional overload can also contribute towards burnout⁴.

Symptoms of burnout

The symptoms of burnout may vary from person to person, but some symptoms you may experience are headaches, feeling like you are 'shutting down', and increased levels of sensory sensitivity⁵. Other symptoms include a lack of motivation, reduced productivity, and irritability.

¹ Maslach and Leiter (2008)

² Costa and Pinto (2017), Stress, burnout and coping in health professionals: a literature review

³ Maslach and Leiter (2016), Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry

⁴ National Autistic Society, <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/autistic-fatigue/autistic-adults>

⁵ National Autistic Society, <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health/autistic-fatigue/autistic-adults>

How can you prevent burnout?

You can implement strategies to prevent overstimulation and subsequent burnout. Here is a list of a few things that you can try:

- Scheduling regular breaks
- Exercise
- Creating routines that work for you
- Maintaining boundaries – saying ‘no’ and not taking on too much work
- Noise-cancelling headphones to reduce outside noise
- Working from home/ asking for workplace accommodations
- Time management – blocking out chunks of your day to manage your work schedule

This list is not exhaustive, but it is a place for you to start and find what works for you. You can also ask your employer to make accommodations for you at work, also known as ‘reasonable adjustments’⁶, to help you manage your workday better and reduce work-related stress.

⁶ Acas (2022), Reasonable adjustments at work, <https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments>