

Beating burnout

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What is burnout?

Burnout is a state of exhaustion that is brought on by chronic exposure to stress.

When in a state of burnout, you may feel exhausted and lacking energy, feeling negatively towards your work and responsibilities, and experience a general lack of productivity.

How does stress differ from burnout?

While burnout and stress have some overlapping characteristics, there are some key places in which they differ.

Stress

- You may feel overwhelmed by the amount of work that you have to do.
- Low levels of stress can motivate us.
- Stress is usually short-term.

Burnout

- Burnout is the point at which the overwhelm has left you feeling like you have no more energy to deal with the amount of work you have to do.
- It has a negative impact on our work and productivity.
- Burnout is a long-term issue.
- It can take much longer to recover from burnout.

What are the causes of burnout?

Taking on too much work

- While you may be able to handle a larger workload in the short-term, as time goes on, this will become more difficult to manage.

Not practicing self-care

- Not prioritising your personal needs can lead to you neglecting yourself and pushing yourself towards burnout.

Negative mentality

- Having a perfectionistic mindset, or feeling the need to take on every task that comes your way, can slowly push you towards a state of burnout.

What are the symptoms of burnout?

Emotional symptoms



Apathy

People who are burned out may begin to feel indifferent, and struggle to find joy in things. It might feel like no matter what you do, it won't make a difference to how you feel.

Self-doubt

Burnout can lead to you starting to doubt yourself and your abilities. You may view yourself in a more negative light.

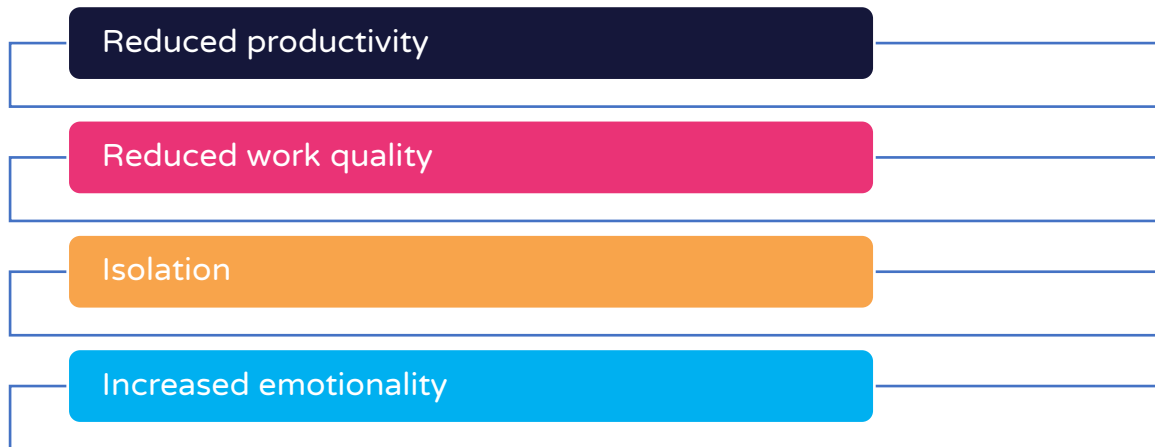
Hopelessness

People who are experiencing burnout may feel quite hopeless about the future, and like their actions won't have any positive consequences.

Detachment

Burnout can also lead to a feeling of detachment, where you no longer feel connected to your job or to the people around you.

Behavioural symptoms



Reduced productivity

People who experience burnout may struggle to keep up with the pace of work that they were previously used to.

Reduced work quality

Burnout can make it difficult to concentrate or think critically and creatively, which can over time lead to a reduction in the quality of the work that you produce.

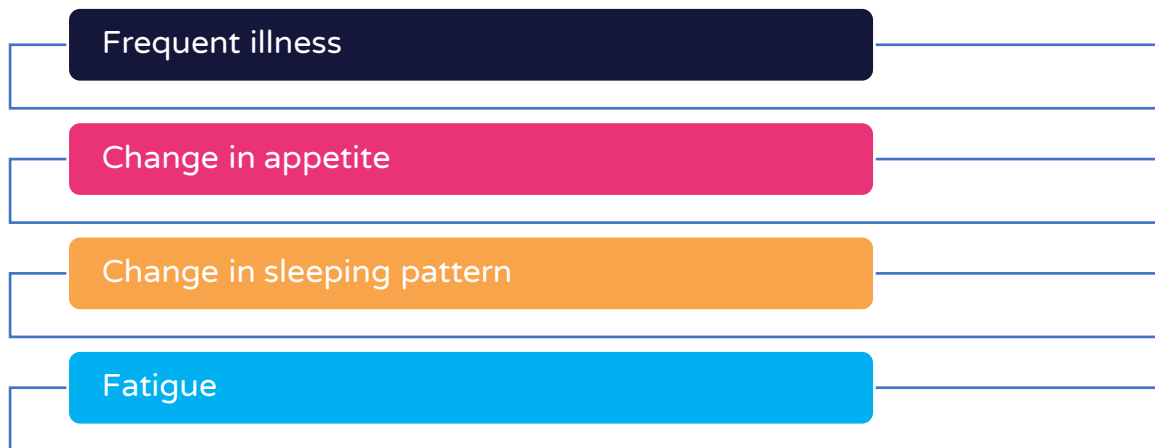
Isolation

As we start to feel less connected to those around us, this can result in isolation. People who are experience burnout may end up separating themselves from those around them and avoiding opportunities for social interaction.

Increased emotionality

Burnout can lead to heightened emotions, which can result in an increased likelihood of getting irritated or angry. This can begin to affect the relationships that you have with other people.

Physical symptoms



Frequent illness

People experiencing burnout are more likely to become unwell and catch colds/flu due to reduced immunity.

Change in appetite

Burnout can lead to a change in appetite. People experiencing burnout may end up losing their appetite, initially skipping meals due to lack of time, and eventually lacking the energy to eat.

Change in sleeping pattern

People experiencing burnout may have reduced sleep or sleep quality. They may struggle to fall asleep or stay asleep due to overwhelming feelings of stress.

Fatigue

Burnout can lead to people feeling exhausted and having consistently low energy levels.

How can you recover from burnout?

While burnout can have quite negative consequences on your overall health and wellbeing, if you take action, it is reversible.

Social interaction

Increasing level of social interaction is an important step on the road to recovery.

Socialising with other people reminds you that you're not alone and may give you an opportunity to talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling.

Friends and family

Be open with your friends, family, and people who know you best about your experiences. They may be able to offer support and reassurance, and make you feel more connected to those around you.

Engage with colleagues

Taking the time to interact with your colleagues can help you feel more grounded and supported at work. They will likely be able to relate to the demands you are facing.

Join groups in the community

It may also help to see what's on in the community. Are there any clubs you can join to get to know other people? You could even volunteer, or take part in an activity that gives you meaning.

Self-care

While it may seem like you don't have time for self-care when faced with your ever-increasing to-do list, if you don't take time out to look after yourself, it is unlikely that you will be able to commit to your responsibilities well.

Take breaks

Take regular breaks during the workday.

Give yourself an opportunity to step away from your desk and clear your head.

Take part in purposeful activities such as reading a book, going for a walk, or spending time with family.

Sleep

Sleep is important to proper functioning, so having a consistent routine is essential.

Practice good sleep hygiene by not working in bed, not using your phone before bed or using a blue light filter, and going to sleep around the same time each night.

Diet

Try to maintain a healthy diet. This will give you the right nutrients and make sure you have enough energy to get through the day.

Take some time out of your day/week to prepare healthy and nutritious meals that will keep you energised.

Exercise

Take regular time out of your week to exercise. Exercise can relieve stress and provide you with a good outlet for your emotions, as well as keeping you healthy.

How can you prevent yourself from burning out again?

After recovering from an episode of burnout, it's important to take steps to prevent it from happening again.

Learn to say no

Be clear about your capacity

Celebrate wins

Learn to say no

Remember that you don't have to say yes to everything that is asked of you. You can't take on everything without risking reducing the overall quality of your work and eventually burning out.

Communicate clearly why you can't take on additional work, and if it is a priority, discuss how responsibilities could be shifted to make it work without putting too much on your plate.

Be clear about your capacity

Make sure that you are honest about your workload and how much you can take on. Often, busy people are asked to help out because the other person doesn't realise just how much they already have on their plate.

Making clear what you have the capacity to do at any given time will ensure that others understand the extent of your workload.

Celebrate wins

When we have a lot on our plate, it's easy for us to forget to take a step back and look at how far we've come.

Celebrate your achievements and remind yourself of why you're working hard. Is it for a promotion? Or to impress an important client?

Keeping your goal in the back of your mind will help you stay motivated and remain positive.