

BURNOUT



What is burnout?

“Burnout” is an occupational condition – unlike depression (which pervades all areas of life), it is not a clinical diagnosis but is expressly related to your relationship with your job.

The term “burnout” was coined in the 1970s by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger. He used it to describe the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in “helping” professions.

Burnout appears in the ICD-11 section on problems related to employment or unemployment. According to this handbook, burnout is described as:

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- Increased mental distance, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job (depersonalisation)
- Reduced professional efficacy

Burnout is caused by excessive chronic stress in the workplace.

Risk factors include:

- The type of work you do – caring professions, professions with high monotony or those with extreme pressure, jobs which do not play to your strengths.
- The job demands and pressures
- The amount of perceived control you have over your work
- The type of manager you have and your relationship with them – are they self-aware and committed to self-mastery or ego driven and blind to their own faults?
- Your own perfectionism
- Your own relationship with work – is it your key expression/factor for self-esteem?

Recovering from and avoiding burnout

Avoiding burnout means understanding stress

The brain is primed to flood the body with stress hormones when it perceives threat or challenge. To a certain extent we can mitigate this by:

- Rationalising those stressors (writing, talking)
- Breathing to regain calm
- Self-care – which actually also provides us with ability to deal with more stressors!

Key protective factors for self-care



Closing off the stress cycle

Even though we may have rationalised our way out of stress, the body needs signs that it can stand down.

Exercise - The most effective way of doing this is through exercise – between 20 and 60 minutes a day in a way which gets your heart rate elevated.

Breathing – Any form of deep breathing, or mindfulness technique.

Social connection – this can be chats with strangers or people you love.

Laughter – you don't even have to find something truly funny to get positive benefits from laughter.

Affection – hugging, kissing, any type of physical affection

Good quality sleep is also key to reducing stress. Most of us need between 7 and 9 hours a day to provide us with that daily MOT. Investigate sleep hygiene if you are not managing that and failing that, try your GP.

When you burn out, you have to stop work entirely for a period and rebuild.

Rebuilding might involve rebalancing your priorities in life:

Score yourself out of 10 on the following areas

- Work /10
- Relationships /10
- Body/health /10
- Meaning/spirituality /10
- Finances /10
- Hobbies /10

Further reading:

Burnout: Emily and Amelia Nagoski (book - 2019)

Unf*ck your Brain: Faith G Harper (book - 2017)

The Stress Solution: Rangan Chatterjee (book - 2018)

Investigate:

Yerkes Dodson Stress Curve

Maslach Burnout Inventory

Stress, Appraisal and Coping - Lazarus et al

Multi-dimension perfectionism scales (Hewitt and Flett or Frost)