

# Extinguishing the flames of burnout



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**T**his was an extraordinary two years—a period unlike any other in our lifetimes. As a result of all that we have been through, you likely know of a loved one or friend who is struggling with high stress or who is a high risk for “burnout.” Burnout is usually associated with “too much” of something, such as work or another activity. While that is true, the underlying issue is usually from the *absence* of something, such as a lack of control (in your schedule and workload), a lack of personal and/or professional support (at home or at work), or little to no work-life balance.

Burnout triggers a full physical response such as high blood pressure, vulnerability to illness and insomnia. If left unchecked, some folks may find coping with the regular functions of daily life very difficult. In addition, the impact can remain even after someone recovers.

## Symptoms

Burnout can manifest in many ways and can result in various symptoms, including the inability to cope with the normal stresses in life, exhaustion, and a feeling of unease or emptiness. Burnout can also have similar symptoms of mental health conditions, such as depression. Some other potential signs of burnout include the following:

- An increase in irritability or conflict
- A pessimistic outlook or marked lack of interest
- Decreased productivity or quality of work
- Restlessness
- Increase in physical discomfort
- Isolation or avoidance in the workplace
- Decision fatigue
- Concentration or memory issues

## Prevention

Avoiding burnout may seem unattainable and unrealistic, but remember that it starts with *you!* Believe in yourself and your proven abilities, and understand your limits. Identify what you would like to realistically accomplish with your time, including your work, activities and relationships. Knowing exactly what you want the outcome to be will help you confidently make good decisions about these areas of your life.

Find an outlet to release your creative energy and distract you from the normal stressors in your life. Whether it’s a gardening or house project, sports activity, art class or new hobby, finding another outlet for your time will allow you to refocus and reenergize.

And, don’t forget about self-care, which plays a key role in preventing burnout. This can take a variety of shapes and forms, including taking a relaxing walk through nature, starting a new workout routine, increasing your sleep and rest periods, improving your diet, or simply pampering yourself with a massage or other relaxation activity. The better you feel as the result of self-care, the better you will be able to manage your stress and keep from burning out.

## Treatment

If you’re experiencing the stress of burnout, please know that there are a number of things you can do to help you through this situation. Taking an honest assessment of your situation is the first step. A professional, such as a therapist, can help you accomplish this in a big way. Although mental health professionals are hard to find these days, you can also lean heavily on the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and seek help and support wherever you can find it, whether it’s friends, family members or co-workers.

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Don’t forget to take allotted breaks during your workday, regardless of how hard that may be. Breaks will help you refocus and reenergize, usually resulting in more productivity at the end of the day. If you feel stressed, take a deep breath before reacting.

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