

Health tip: Recognizing burnout

Originally used to describe the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in “helping” professions, burnout may affect individuals in several career fields, from career-driven people to overworked employees, homemakers, and students.¹

According to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), burnout is an occupational phenomenon characterized by three dimensions. These dimensions include feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism related to one’s job.²

Signs and symptoms of burnout^{1,3}

There are three main groups of symptoms that are signs of burnout:

- 1. Exhaustion.** Those affected feel drained and emotionally exhausted, unable to cope, tired and down, and don’t have enough energy. Physical symptoms include things such as pain and gastrointestinal problems.
- 2. Alienation from work-related activities.** People who have burnout find their jobs to be increasingly stressful and frustrating. They may start to be cynical about their working conditions and colleagues while also distancing themselves emotionally.
- 3. Reduced performance.** Burnout typically affects everyday tasks at work, at home or when caring for family members. Those impacted are very negative about their tasks, find it hard to concentrate and lack creativity.

It is important not to confuse the signs and symptoms of burnout with those for stress or depression. Signs and symptoms that occur in both burnout and depression include feeling down, extremely exhausted and experiencing reduced performance. When seeking help, it is recommended to speak with a medical professional as self-diagnosing may lead to the wrong treatment.

In contrast, burnout may be the result of unrelenting stress, but it is not the same thing as too much stress. While stress involves **too much**, burnout is about **not enough**.



Myths about burnout

There are many myths about burnout; don’t be fooled. Some myths include.

Myth. You must not be good at your job.

Myth. Burnout means you need to make a job change.

Myth. Burnout may be overcome by working harder.

Myth. One day of rest will make everything better.

Myth. Taking time away from work or investing in self-care makes you weak.

Causes and consequences of burnout⁴

There are several possible causes and consequences of burnout. Specifically, job burnout may result from:

1. **Lack of control.** An inability to influence decisions could lead to job burnout.
2. **Unclear job expectations.** Lack of clarity may lead to feelings of discomfort.
3. **Dysfunctional workplace dynamics.** Office bullies and micro-managers may increase stress.
4. **Extremes of activity.** A monotonous or chaotic job may lead to fatigue and burnout.
5. **Lack of social support.** Feelings of isolation at work and at home may increase stress.
6. **Work-life imbalance.** Work that leaves little personal time may lead to burnout.

Consequences from burnout range from excessive stress, fatigue, and insomnia to alcohol or substance abuse, heart disease, and high blood pressure.

Coping with burnout³

Ignoring warning signs of burnout may cause further emotional and physical change. It's important to pause and change direction and learn coping strategies to overcome burnout by utilizing the "Three R" approach:

- **Recognize.** Watch for the warning signs of burnout.
- **Reverse.** Undo the damage by seeking support and managing stress.
- **Resilience.** Build your resilience to stress by taking care of your physical and emotional health.

The following tips for preventing or dealing with burnout may help you cope with symptoms and regain your energy, focus, and sense of well-being.

- **Evaluate your options.** Discuss specific concerns with your supervisor. Work together to change expectations or reach solutions.
- **Seek support.** Options for support may include co-workers, friends, loved ones or your EAP.
- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore programs such as yoga, meditation, or tai chi.
- **Get some exercise.** Regular physical activity may help you to better deal with stress.
- **Get some sleep.** Sleep restores well-being and helps protect your health.
- **Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is the act of focusing on your breath flow and being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling at every moment, without interpretation or judgment. In a job setting, this practice involves facing situations with openness and patience, and without judgment.



Sources:

1. NIH. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK279286/>. 2024. Accessed November 2025.
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3. Helpguide. <https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery>. 2025. Accessed November 2025.
4. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>. 2023. Accessed November 2025.

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