

BURNOUT 101

getting started



WHAT IS BURNOUT?

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) updated its definition of burnout: **A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.**

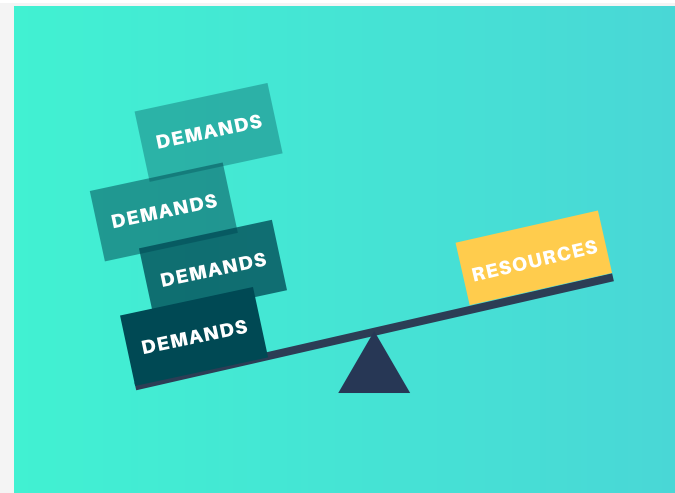
Burnout is characterized by three symptoms:

- **Exhaustion.** Feelings of energy depletion or ongoing fatigue.
- **Cynicism.** Increased mental distance from one's job or negative feelings towards one's career.
- **Inefficacy.** Feelings of incompetence or lack of achievement; reduced professional productivity.

You may be experiencing all three symptoms, or perhaps just one. For example, some people may be exhausted, but haven't yet developed cynicism or feelings of incompetence. It's important to **become aware** of which symptoms are strongest for you, so that you know how best to seek support.

WHAT CAUSES BURNOUT?

Burnout occurs when there is **an imbalance between your job demands and your job resources**, and it's more likely to occur when job demands outweigh job resources. Job demands are aspects of your work that require sustained effort and energy. Job resources are aspects of your work that give you motivation and energy and stimulate personal growth, learning, and development.¹



⚠️ WARNING SIGNS

Physical: *Frequent headaches, getting sick more often than usual, prolonged fatigue, stomach and digestive issues, restlessness, insomnia, heart palpitations, chest pain, cardiovascular disease, changes in pain experiences.*

Psychological: *Panic attacks, increasing feelings of anger, frustration and irritability, feeling hopeless, helpless, and pessimistic, loss of enjoyment for activities you once loved, depression, anxiety.*

Behavioral: *Drop in productivity, increased absenteeism, isolation—wanting to eat lunch alone or just be alone, coming into work later than usual on a more consistent basis, becoming a poor team player, mood changes, irritability, job dissatisfaction, increased alcohol/drug use.²*



HOW TO PREVENT BURNOUT

The biggest contributors to burnout are typically situational, so adjustments made at the job, team, or organizational level are important and often required to address the underlying causes. That said, thankfully there are things that you can also do individually to alleviate symptoms you may be experiencing and prevent further burnout.

1 Investigate your own symptoms and causes of burnout.

Sometimes we lump "stressed out" into one big category. With a bit of kind investigation, we can learn A LOT about what's actually causing our stress or overwhelm. Do any of the above symptoms listed resonate with you? Instead of focusing on how stressed out you feel, take some time to reflect (or journal) on what exactly the root cause(s) may be. Is the workload simply too much? Are you taking work home with you? Are your goals unclear? Are you fearful that you won't meet expectations? Do you feel rushed/pressured while you're working? Do you have difficult or tense work relationships? Continue to explore, with an open curiosity, what is *actually* causing you to feel stressed. You could even keep a notepad next to you for a week and when you notice the feeling of stress, jot down any sources you can identify. This reflection process will help you develop insight into your experience and prioritize what issues need to be addressed first.

2 Create space for NON-DOING in your day.

It's critical in our fast-paced, digitized modern lives to create space to replenish our mental, physical, and emotional energies. One of the best ways to do this is, ironically, to do nothing at all! Literally turn off your engine and allow yourself to chill out. So many of our natural moments of space – like waiting for our computer to boot up, sitting at a bus stop, or going for a stroll, are now consumed by checking Instagram, listening to podcasts, texting, calling friends, etc. Our brains are almost always working, and this is taxing for our wellbeing. Ask yourself – when was the last time you were awake and doing *nothing*? Especially during the workday, creating small pauses for non-doing go a long way (even 5-minutes). Mindfulness and meditation practice are huge supports in learning how to *just be*.

3 Identify + prioritize things that fill your cup.

Life's too short to constantly be putting off the things you enjoy. Sometimes, especially if we're working a lot, it can be hard to feel like we have time to do those things. But it's useful to challenge this assumption – are there little things you can pepper into your day that bring you joy? Savoring those first few sips of coffee. Rockin' out to your favorite song at lunch. Stretching your body. Telling your colleague a joke. Savoring your lunch. Stepping outside for a few deep breaths every 30 minutes. Pinning inspiring, uplifting photos in your work space. Lighting a candle at the start of your day. This will look different for everyone, but those small moments really add up.

4 Check your mindset.

As humans, we often put limiting boxes around our experiences and what is possible. We then feel "stuck" and increasingly dissatisfied, which contributes to burnout. Interestingly, so many of these boxes are a product of a fixed mindset! You could ask yourself, "*what aspects of my situation are truly fixed, or which could I change?*" If you immediately think, "*I can't change any of them*" ask yourself, "*Is that really true? Have I asked or looked into it?*" Are there ways to reshape your job or workflow in a way that's more fulfilling? What are you believing about yourself or your work environment that may simply not be true? A very wise meditation teacher named Pema Chödrön says, "**It isn't the content of our movie that needs our attention, it's the projector.**" When we spend a little bit of time working on the projector, the quality of the entire movie begins to improve, pronto!

5 Seek connection.

Feeling alone in your workplace/workload struggles can fuel burnout. Consider reaching out to others for support and camaraderie. If you're feeling burnt out, chances are you have colleagues who are suffering too. Consider how it would feel to connect with them, offer each other mutual support, and advocate for potential solutions. Working with a mentor or coach can also be beneficial – having another person on your "team" to help you see objectively, brainstorm, and speak up for what you want or need.

6 Cultivate your inner ally.

When the going gets tough, our inner critic also tends to get tougher. Learning to develop an inner friendship with yourself could be the most important thing you do in your whole life. After all, you're with yourself 24/7! Think for a moment – if a really good friend was struggling and came to you for support right now, how would you respond to them? Would you be understanding, loving, and patient? What tone of voice would you use? It's likely that you treat yourself very differently when you are working through your own struggles. With practice, you can learn to offer the same kindness and support to yourself that you would offer to a good friend. Especially while navigating the realm of burnout, this inner ally ingredient is a game-changer.