

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Understanding and Avoiding Burnout

"Burnout" is commonly understood as a stress condition brought on by being involved in an intense situation for a long period of time without enough rest and recreation. Although usually thought of in relation to a job, people who are the primary caregiver for small children or someone who is severely or chronically ill also experience burnout.

Symptoms of burnout can include:

- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Sense of cynicism and alienation
- Impatience
- Negative attitude
- Feeling of detachment
- Listlessness

Learning to understand burnout can help you to avoid it. Try to know your own limits and develop coping strategies for periods when stress overload seems unavoidable. Here are some great tips to help you cope with—and get through—feelings of burnout:

If you're feeling burned out, it might be useful to ask yourself some of the following questions. The answers could help you establish some boundaries in areas of your life that may currently be out of balance:

- When did you begin feeling this way (tired, unable to relax, etc.)?
- Are you under a lot of pressure to succeed? From whom?
- How’s your sense of humor holding up?
- Are you identifying so closely with your work that if a project fails, you will think you personally have failed?

To overcome burnout, try some of the following:

- Write down key values, as well as long-term and short-term goals.
- Set aside time each day for relaxation exercises—and do them.
- Analyze how you spend your time. Learn and practice time management techniques.
- Move towards healthier eating habits; exercise more frequently.
- Renew your friendships.
- Talk about your feelings; don't let anger or frustration build up.
- Learn to say no when you're given more than you can handle.
- Recognize when you're driving yourself too hard and depleting your inner resources. Take a break.

Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

When you ignore your physical and emotional needs during a period of constant or severe stress, you are likely to get burned out.

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Good self-care includes:

- Eating nutritious, well-balanced meals at regular hours.
- Regular exercise—why not try walking or jogging around the block at lunch time?
- Adequate and satisfying sleep.

If you are depriving yourself in these areas, you are not doing anyone any favors. Start practising good self-care today. Regular rest and recreation are essential to help avoid burnout.

Share Your Experience with Others

Consider joining a support group for people in your situation. For example, a support group for caregivers, new mothers or workaholics. Listen to what others have to say about the strategies they use to cope. Talking with someone outside your situation who might have new ideas can be very helpful.

You can learn how to avoid, or come through a period of burnout by learning and communicating your own limits, taking care of yourself and learning from the ideas and strategies of others. Furthermore, by re-connecting with your true self, your values and what you truly want from life, you will be in a better position to recognize, and overcome, feelings of burnout.

It’s important to recognize the early warning signs of burnout before they get any worse. By taking steps to get your life back into balance, you can prevent the onset of a breakdown and begin to take care of yourself again. If burnout is becoming severe and is affecting your ability to function properly, talk to your doctor or a professional.