



Recovery From Burnout

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Burnout is a feeling of exhaustion and emptiness due to prolonged stress, often work-related. It means being worn out physically and emotionally. It can also involve feeling useless, powerless, and empty. It is a truly horrible state of being as most people in burnout are too exhausted to do anything or care about anything. Often all they want to do is cry or sit at home and do nothing. It is the opposite of what most of us think of as a full, meaningful, and happy life experience.

What can you do if you have burnout or are clearly heading in that direction.

In an ideal world, reaching the point of burnout would mean you immediately take time off, clear your schedule, and dedicate your days to rest and relaxation. If you can do that, then do it. Sometimes burnout is so bad that a medical professional will book you off work and sometimes even hospitalisation is necessary.

But what can you do if you cannot do that. Then you need to proactively put in place some steps to reduce your responsibilities and recover. Which is hard, because someone with burnout really does not feel like they have the energy to proactively do anything.

- Start with simple things first, especially if you are too exhausted to engage in complex thinking. Which will often be the case.
 - Write down and evaluate your existing commitments. Drop what you can and delegate what you can. Pushout what you cannot dump or delegate.
 - Pursue a healthy lifestyle. That means get enough sleep, eat nutritious food, stay hydrated, do some gentle exercise (don't go and run a marathon if you are exhausted), engage in relaxing activities, and spend time with friends and loved ones.
 - Contact your support network and get support. Some people hate asking for help, however other people are not necessarily going to think you are a nuisance or weak. Often, they would love to help you. Feeling you belong is important for conquering burnout which is another benefit of turning to your support group for help.
 - If your company offers an employee assistance programme then reach out to them.
- In the long-term you may need to make more permanent changes in your life and behaviour.

- Track what you spend your time doing. Then make changes so your schedule is realistic.
- Where you can get more control over your schedule and activities do so. Feeling that others control your time is more stressful than we realise. Taking back control of your time will help you.
- Identify your stressors and find ways to mitigate their impact.
- Set and communicate clear boundaries. People won't hate you for having boundaries unless they are using you. Most people respect boundaries and understand the need for them.
- Learn to say no and say it. You are not here to make everyone happy all the time.
- Speak to your boss about your challenges. Look at what can be taken off your plate. Look at where you might be doing the work of other people. Look at where you will not delegate because you think you can do the job better than anyone else. Get clarity on what is expected of you and set realistic goals.
- You may need to learn new skills and implement them, such as: time management, prioritisation, boundary management, assertiveness, and even technical skills to make it quicker and easier to do your job.
- When you leave work at the end of the day, learn to leave work at work. After work focus on having fun and relaxing.
- Some activities drain us and others fill us with energy. Look at what activities give you energy and make sure you do some of those. Make a list of activities that you enjoy. Your "things that make me happy" list. Make sure you do two or three of these a week.
- Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of what is going on inside you and around you without judging or reacting. Just notice what is going on inside you. Notice what you are thinking.
- Superman and superwoman are fiction. You cannot do everything all the time at the same time. Maybe some things need to be postponed to another time in life. Maybe you need to say no to some things you may even like to do, but just would not fit into your day. Re-evaluate your goals and values.

If you have burnout or are heading in that direction have a conversation with your manager. Discuss what you can realistically do. If you can, some time off may be good. If your workplace insists on being unrealistic in terms of what you can do, then you need to consider a change to a different workplace.

Burnout is self-defeating. We get it because we feel we have to do everything. When we get burnout we find we can do nothing. We live in a world where being overly busy and stressed is something of a status symbol. It's not. It's a recipe to end up physically and mentally damaged. Human beings are capable of many great things. No one, however, can work nonstop and be good at it. The human brain needs a break. In particular the higher thinking skills don't work at all well if you are exhausted and burnt out. To really do great work, as in the case of sports, you need to have rest and time out. You cannot push yourself forever. And if you try to do that, you may end up being able to do far less than if you just kept an even pace. It is certainly possible for a healthy person to work extra hard for a few days or possibly even weeks. But ongoing overload is only going to bring out the worst in you.