



# Signs of Burnout

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Burnout is being in a state of exhaustion. It can literally feel like the life has been sucked out of you. It is typically caused by ongoing extreme stress that doesn't cease. When we are stressed we know we are stressed and we release the energy to enable us to complete what we need to accomplish. People who experience stress also recognise that when the overload stops things will go back to normal. They can imagine an end to the excessive tasks and know that when the workload is reduced they will go back to normal. Burnout is different. It is when the stress is so intense and so prolonged that we feel complete exhaustion, have no energy to do anything, lose interest in work and activities, and feel like this will never end. Burnout leaves you feeling empty, demotivated, and unable to care about anything. Stress tends to be about "too much". Burnout is about "not enough". Burnout makes you feel depleted and used up and can be due to a constant ongoing excess of work, having too many responsibilities, and experiencing a lack of appreciation.

Burnout doesn't happen immediately. It is a gradual build-up of significant stress in your life until you can't go on anymore. You do want to try and stop burnout before it hits you because the path to recovery from burnout can be a long one of rest, changing behaviours, and recovering an interest in life and activities.

Below are some of the signs of burnout. If you notice any of these then you need to take immediate action to reduce responsibilities or take some other action to reduce ongoing stress in your life.

## **Physical Signs:**

A lot of these are also found with stress, but if you find you experience these on an ongoing basis then you need to be aware you need to make some changes.

- With burnout you will feel a constant fatigue. Some people battle to even get out of bed in the morning. You feel like you have no energy to do anything.
- Experiencing more illnesses such as colds and flu, stomach upsets and intestinal ailments. For a lot of people stress affects the digestive system considerably. Changes in appetite can occur as well.

- Sleep problems such as difficulty sleeping or wanting to sleep a lot can occur.
- Recurring headaches.

***Mental and Emotional Symptoms:***

- Feeling apathetic where you don't care about anything can be a sign of burnout. Caring about something takes energy which you don't have. There is a lack of enjoyment in life. Feeling numb about your work and personal life are also signs of burnout.
- Feeling cynical and negative towards your job and career. It is not unusual to lose your sense of purpose when you are experiencing burnout.
- Experiencing self-doubt, feeling like a failure, feeling helpless and defeated. Feeling like nothing you do makes a difference and nothing you do is appreciated.

***Behavioural signs:***

- Feeling detached from others and isolating yourself. Distancing yourself from others. Feeling like you are on your own. Withdrawing from people and experiencing difficulty in connecting with others.
- Being less productive which can include procrastinating, skipping work, coming in late and leaving early. Withdrawing from or disregarding responsibilities. Being creative is almost impossible. Decisions are difficult to make.
- Decreased motivation. Dread of going to work.
- Avoidance of social activities, no time for nonwork-related activities.
- Neglecting personal needs and self-care.
- Increase in substance abuse – typically abusing food, drugs and alcohol to cope.

That is quite a scary list. And as you read through the above list, you can see that burnout can sometimes resemble depression. However, burnout and depression are not the same and usually need different treatment. Depression is a mood disorder and typically affects your whole life. It usually has genetic, psychological and environmental causes, and to be treated successfully needs a combination of medication, psychotherapy, support, and thinking and behavioural changes. Burnout is total exhaustion – usually associated with too many responsibilities which can include work, parenting, and care-giving responsibilities. It needs rest and a healthy lifestyle. It usually needs quite a lot of behavioural changes such as putting in boundaries, managing time, reassessing responsibilities and duties undertaken and learning to say no. Managing stress before it becomes overwhelming is also important. People with depression don't find enjoyment in activities. People with burnout are too tired to do anything.

And sometimes you can have both – depression and burnout. In which case you need to get treated

for both. Also be aware that burnout can sometimes lead to depression where the person did not have depression before.

If you have ever experienced burnout you most probably never want to go through the experience again. We want to live life. That means we want to experience joy, have fun, and live life to the full. That is the ultimate for most of us. Burnout results in the exact opposite. And depending on how bad your burnout is, and how depleted your body gets, it can take a very long time to get better. Do a check on your life. Do you have many of the above signs of burnout? If you do then start cutting back on your tasks and responsibilities, delegating them or dumping them where you can, and focus on getting your life back into balance.