

A lit matchstick is shown vertically against a clear blue sky. The matchstick is dark brown and has a bright orange and yellow flame at the top. The background is a gradient of blue, lighter at the top and darker at the bottom.

Does constant stress leave you feeling hopeless, unmotivated, and extremely exhausted?

You could be on the road to burnout – and you wouldn't even know it.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

STRESS & BURNOUT

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This article takes you through the distinctive signs and symptoms of burnout, understanding the difference between stress and burnout, and ways to help you deal with the negative effects of burnout.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF BURNOUT

Burnout reduces productivity, energy efficiency and leaving you feeling like you have nothing left to give. When stress becomes prolonged and greater than our ability to cope with, it can lead to feeling physically, mentally and emotionally drained. This impacts your mental wellbeing, which allows you to set and fulfill goals, build and maintain relationships, and have life satisfaction.



What is burnout?

Burnout is defined as the state of complete mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion. You may have guessed it, burnout is caused by prolonged, excessive, and uncontrollable stress. As you respond to the immediate stressors around you, you can start to feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained. So, when stress continues, you begin to lose the motivation, energy and interest that had driven you in the first place.

It spills over into every aspect of life and could cause significant damage. Because of its consequences and negative effects, burnout needs to be addressed ASAP!

While you're usually aware of being under stress and experiencing prolonged stress, you don't always notice burnout when it happens. And although burnout may be the result of excessive stress, the difference between stress and burnout is important to be mindful of.

Understand the difference



CAUSES OF BURNOUT

The OBVIOUS one, **work-related causes** which may include feeling a lack of control over your work, high demanding job expectations, and working in a high-pressure environment.

There are other areas that come into play as well.

Lifestyle causes include not getting enough sleep, taking on too many responsibilities and not asking for help, working too much without time for self-care. Various **personality traits** that can contribute to burnout such as perfectionist tendencies, the need to be in control, and a high-achieving personality type.

Physical symptoms:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Frequent illnesses (lowered immunity)
- Sleep disturbances

Emotional symptoms:

- Self-doubt and sense of failure
- Decreased satisfaction
- Loss of motivation
- Cynicism

Behavioral symptoms:

- Reduced performance and productivity
- Procrastination
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Using substances to cope

How do I know I'm in a state of burnout?

3 distinctive signs of burnout: the warning signs

1. Exhaustion

is the central symptom of burnout and a huge indication. It comprises profound physical, cognitive, and emotional fatigue that will affect the ability to work effectively. This leads to a decrease in feeling positive about what you're doing.

2. Cynicism (depersonalisation)

represents a decline in engagement, distancing yourself psychologically from work. Instead of feeling passionate, invested, positive and motivated about your work, you then start to feel detached and negative when thinking about work.

3. Inefficacy

relates to feelings of incompetence, a lack of achievement/productivity. Feelings of hopelessness, that your capabilities/skills are not good enough or that you feel 'stupid.' This sign develops in tandem with the previous two.

Now you may be asking, how do I deal with burnout or stop feeling this severe exhaustion? Well in anything that we do, it takes time, energy, and practice. It won't change overnight. So, once we become aware of burnout and our symptoms, there are a few ways we can use to deal with burnout and its effects.

WAYS TO DEAL WITH BURNOUT

How do we manage stress in a controlled manner that prevents us from experiencing burnout? Now is the time to change the direction in which you are currently going and learn how to overcome or prevent burnout.

A disclaimer: these tips are not going to cure your symptoms or solve the problems you are experiencing but they are ways that can help you cope with these symptoms and deal with the effects of burnout. We all want a quick solution however, these are skills that need to be developed overtime, and a process that will take practice, energy and the mindset to get through.

Find a balance in your life and navigate what parts give you joy and motivation, as opposed to other parts that give you stress and pressure – is it balanced?

- Identify what is causing your stress.
- Find stress management tools that work for you (meditation, journalling, social support).
- Learn about your stress (write down what is stressing you, how it makes you feel, and healthy ways in which you manage stress e.g. taking a walk or listening to music).
- Pinpoint what you can control vs what you can't control.
- Prioritise self-care (activities you enjoy, practices that promote your well-being, prioritizing healthy sleeping habits, nutrition, exercises, social connection and taking regular breaks within the day).