

Understanding Burnout

RECOGNISING THE SIGNS · UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES · FINDING A WAY BACK

When the demands of work keep outweighing the resources to meet them

Burnout can develop after long-term work stress that hasn't been successfully managed. The World Health Organization describes it as an **occupational phenomenon rather than a medical condition** (WHO, 2019). It is not a sign of weakness: it often reflects an ongoing mismatch between a person and the conditions of their work.

when energy is spent faster than it can be restored



01 Three common dimensions

Tick anything that feels familiar lately



Exhaustion

Feeling drained and depleted

- ☐ Tired most of the time, even after rest
- ☐ Dreading the start of the working day
- ☐ Poor sleep, headaches or other physical strain



Mental distance

Detachment, negativity or cynicism

- ☐ Feeling numb, cynical or detached about work
- ☐ Pulling back from colleagues or clients
- ☐ Doing only what's needed to get through



Reduced effectiveness

Feeling less capable at work

- ☐ Doubting my competence or contribution
- ☐ Finding it hard to focus or finish tasks
- ☐ Feeling that nothing I do makes a difference

02 What may be contributing

Six areas of work life described by Maslach & Leiter

Workload

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Is the amount of work sustainable, with time to recover?

Control

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Do I have a say in how and when my work gets done?

Reward

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Is my effort recognised, financially or in other ways?

Community

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Do I feel supported and connected to the people I work with?

Fairness

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Are decisions and treatment at work fair and respectful?

Values

● Good fit ● Mixed ● Poor fit

Does my work fit with what matters to me?

Burnout, depression, or both?

Burnout and depression can look very similar, and researchers continue to debate how distinct they are (Bianchi et al., 2015). If low mood, loss of interest or hopelessness spread across all areas of life, or you have thoughts of harming yourself, please speak with a health professional.

03 Finding a way back

Both personal and work changes can matter

What I can do

- **Protect recovery time:** breaks, evenings and leave where possible.
- **Mark the end of work:** a small routine that helps you switch off.
- **Look after the basics:** sleep, food and some movement.
- **Stay connected:** spend time with people who support you.
- **Reconnect with meaning:** notice what still matters, in or outside work.

What may help at work

- Talking with a manager about workload and priorities
- Clarifying expectations, roles and boundaries
- Asking about flexibility, adjustments or time off
- Using an employee assistance programme, if available
- Raising concerns about fairness through appropriate channels

Burnout isn't solved by individual effort alone; work conditions matter too.

04 My burnout plan

Fill in when you have a quiet moment

My early warning signs

One boundary I'll set or protect

One conversation I could have, and with whom

The areas of work life under most strain

One thing that restores me, and when I'll make time for it

Pressures outside work adding to the load

My energy for work lately

0 = completely depleted · 10 = fully energised



When to seek support: if exhaustion, low mood or physical symptoms persist, speak with your psychologist or GP.

What the research suggests: burnout has been linked with mismatches between people and their work across areas such as workload, control and fairness (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Research on the most effective ways to prevent or recover from burnout is still limited, and approaches that address both the individual and the workplace are often recommended.

SOURCES

Bianchi, R., Schonfeld, I. S., & Laurent, E. (2015). Burnout-depression overlap: A review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 36, 28–41.

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