

Avoiding Burnout

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Today we are going to talk about burnout. What it is, and what you can do to avoid it.

For somebody who has, or currently is suffering from burnout, we want you to understand what you're feeling, and why you're feeling it. We also want you to know that it is infinitely more common than you might imagine it to be. Finally, we want to help by delivering actionable tips, which you can implement immediately, to put a stop to burnout.

For a manager who suspects team members may be suffering, we want to help you get the most out of your team without making them suffer the symptoms of burnout, and learn preventions and cures for burnout if it arises.

Walk into almost any office in the world, and you'll hear people complain of burnout. It's a colloquial term to describe a feeling of fatigue and pessimism, something that comes after working too hard for too long, without any real break.

Clinical psychologists Herbert Freudenberger and Christina Maslach determined burnout to be ['resulting from "excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources"'](#), and ['characterized by a set of symptoms including emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy'](#). But it was only as recently as 2019 that the *World Health Organization* [officially recognized burnout as an occupational phenomenon](#).

And yet, it's incredibly common. According to a [2021 survey](#) of 1500 US employees by the jobs board *Indeed*, 52% of people reported suffering from burnout.

It has been linked to increased risk of coronary artery disease, hypertension, sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, and increased alcohol and drug use. It can undermine the quality of relationships and diminish long-term career prospects.

So, burnout sucks. But then it's kind of in the name, right?

Thankfully, there's a lot we can do to prevent the onset of burnout. And for those who are feeling it right now, we have some tips that will help lift the malaise, so you can get back to feeling yourself.

A 2012 study in the [Journal of Occupational Health Psychology](#) found that insufficient sleep is a significant risk factor for subsequent burnout.

"You're putting energy in the bank when you go to sleep," says Barry Krakow, MD, author of *Sound Sleep, Sound Mind: 7 Keys to Sleeping Through the Night*. "On a cellular level, the body is literally repairing and restoring itself. Without it, you can't do what you want -- physically or mentally."

So it should come as no surprise that if you're not getting enough sleep, you're predisposed to higher levels of stress and the exhaustion symptomatic of burnout. If you're struggling to sleep through the night, we have a few tips.

According to Dr. Neil Stanley, author of *How to Sleep Well: The Science of Sleeping Smarter, Living Better and Being Productive*, "[the most simple and effective change people can make to their sleep is to fix their wake-up time so it's regular, seven days a week, 365 days a year](#)". That helps maintain the timing of the body's internal clock so that you fall asleep and wake up more easily, and feel less tired in the daytime.

He also emphasizes the importance of relaxing before bed - whether that's taking a bath, drinking chamomile tea, or listening to music - pre-sleep relaxation is essential. **Making that into a routine is doubly effective.**

You should **avoid computers or mobile devices for at least an hour before trying to sleep**, as the blue light they emit suppresses the release of melatonin (the body's signal to start the cascade of processes to fall asleep) which happens when we're in total darkness.

But what if, despite your best efforts, you just couldn't get the sleep you needed last night?

According to Dr. Sara C. Mednick, author of *Take a Nap! Change Your Life*, "**You can get incredible benefits from 15 to 20 minutes of napping**. You reset the system and

get a burst of alertness and increased motor performance. That's what most people really need to stave off sleepiness and get an energy boost."

It's not easy to change your sleeping habits, but if you do, it might just be the key to preventing burnout.

But aside from sleep-related changes, what else can you control?

Dr. Kira Schabram is an assistant professor of management at the University of Washington, where she studies burnout in employees.

Her research suggests that [acts of compassion toward yourself and others can help reduce feelings of burnout](#). Making yourself your favorite meal or paying your colleague a genuine compliment may have more of an impact than you realize.

We know that engaging in compassionate acts can have long-lasting protective effects against depression, which is so closely linked to burnout. Additionally, people's desire to reciprocate acts of kindness means that if you go out of your way to be kind, there's a good chance you can make a positive cultural impact at work.

As well as giving, sometimes one of the best things you can do is to ask for help.

["Letting colleagues and your manager know you're not OK is key"](#), says Dr. Maslach. Sometimes it may not feel like it, but people are amazing. If you knew somebody else felt that they needed to speak to someone, wouldn't you want to help? The same applies to others - it's in our nature to want to help others.

If you are a manager, it might even be a good idea occasionally to make a deliberate effort to share that you're tired, overwhelmed, or maxed out. Of course, your job is to motivate people, but showing vulnerability now and again can be a great way to show real authenticity. This can create a feeling of safety, enabling others to talk about their own issues, which in turn creates a more supportive and engaged team.

Both Dr. Schabram and Dr. Maslach emphasized that **employers are ultimately responsible for conditions that drive burnout**, so if you're a manager, it's essential that you look after your team. Only [21% of survey respondents said they were able to have open, productive conversations with HR about their burnout](#), so if you're a leader, you should be looking to buck that trend. Building a high-performing team that respects you, and wants to work for you comes from creating the right environment. If the moral justification isn't enough to rationalize doing everything you can to ensure your people don't feel burned out - though we all know it is - the long-term losses felt in absenteeism and decreased productivity should be.

If you're feeling the effects of burnout personally, take a step back and ask yourself what you can do to help yourself. Start with what we've gone through here - namely: sleep, altruistic and compassionate behavior, and openness. You should also consider looking into mindfulness, practicing meditation, and some other techniques which we talk about in 'Managing Work Anxiety'.

Reading List

- **[Article]** [Employee Burnout Report: COVID-19's Impact and 3 Strategies to Curb It](#), Kristy Threlkeld.
- **[Article]** [Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry](#), Christina Maslach, Michael P. Leiter.
- **[Article]** [Why Embracing Your Impostor Syndrome is a Really Bad Idea](#), Valerie Young.
- **[Article]** [The Secret \(and Surprising\) Power of Naps](#), Jennifer Soong.
- **[Article]** [Everyday prosociality in the workplace: The reinforcing benefits of giving, getting, and glimpsing.](#), Chancellor, J., Margolis, S., Jacobs Bao, K., & Lyubomirsky, S.
- **[Article]** [How to Beat Burnout - Without Quitting Your Job](#), Catherine Zuckerman.
- **[Article]** [Staff Burn-out](#), Herbert Freudenberger.
- **[Article]** [The measurement of experienced burnout](#), Christina Maslach, Susan E. Jackson.
- **[Article]** [Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases](#), WHO.
- **[Book]** *Sound Sleep, Sound Mind: 7 Keys to Sleeping Through the Night.*, Barry Krakow.
- **[Book]** *How to Sleep Well: The Science of Sleeping Smarter, Living Better and Being Productive*, Dr Neil Stanley.
- **[Book]** *Take a Nap! Change Your Life*, Sara C. Mednick.
- **[Article]** [Insufficient Sleep Predicts Clinical Burnout](#), Marie Söderström, Kerstin Jeding, Mirjam Ekstedt, Aleksander Perski
- **[Podcast]** [Busting 7 Common Sleep Myths](#), Dr Neil Stanley
- **[Video]** [Understanding Job Burnout](#), Dr. Christina Maslach
- **[Article]** [Most of us are burned out; what more can HR do to help?](#), Kathryn Mayer