

## **A Brief Description of Burnout**

Let's start with a definition of burnout. It is an occupational phenomenon or syndrome that results from unmanaged chronic stress. It was first used to describe one's inability to cope with life or perform daily tasks. You can burn out emotionally, mentally, physically, or any combination of the three. Typically, burnout is so wide-sweeping in its effect on a person that all three areas of life will unite to create total burnout.

Burnout is a continuum. Think of it as a multistage event that continues until something is done to abate the lifestyle that created it. Stress is not burnout, and neither is depression. Stress is when you have too much on your plate. Burnout is when this stress is chronic for enough time that you feel like you don't have enough time, energy, or motivation.

Depression has feelings of overwhelm, like burnout. You can be "burned out" from the rigors of a busy and demanding life with great responsibility, but most of the time it has to do with your workplace. Having said that, it is important to know that caretakers and those with great responsibility at home, which is their workplace, are susceptible to chronic stress and burnout. Depression tends to create feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in a general way that extends to all of life. You can see some overlap here, but burnout is born out of chronic and unending stress and extends to our mental, emotional, and physical selves.

Below, I will describe the different stages and some common symptoms. I will also include another document with questions designed to uncover whether you are entering the continuum, in the continuum, or avoiding it altogether. This survey is not scientific, it is self-realizing. Your score may tell one story, but your answers will reveal the truth. Thoughtfully look over this material and answer with great honesty.

The first stage of burnout isn't burnout at all. It is when you take on more than you can handle. Frequently, you are full of energy and optimism. You want to prove yourself or know that the work is important. You have this subtle feeling that this is too much, but you push off or shove that feeling down because you think you are able.

The next stage of burnout is when the stress sets in. You notice that you are not thinking so positively anymore about being able to tackle everything. You may be more irritated at things or people who block you from being able to perform, or there may be a constant need to perform your tasks without much rest or time off. Some days are very stressful, and you find it hard to let it go when you finally get home. You have a hard time enjoying life because of the constant load you feel, and it is difficult to shut off your brain to think about non-work or non-task things. Also, in this stage, you tend to talk much about what is stressing you out. You may begin to experience difficulty sleeping, gaining weight, or dealing with fatigue and muscle cramps.

Chronic stress is the next stage. It is when the stress that has set in never lets up. It begins to affect different areas of your life. Socially, you may withdraw, and you may experience

unusual but frequent frustrations and anger that are hard to control. You are exhausted much of the time and try to remedy that by eating crap carbohydrates, or you may go the other way and begin to lose weight because you have no appetite and may develop an eating disorder. Your sleep is interrupted, and you want to get off this track but don't know how. You may turn to anything to numb you. Drugs and alcohol, as well as frivolous spending and other avenues of distraction, look more enticing than ever before. Your performance is slipping, and you become increasingly resentful, cynical, and maybe even apathetic as you are persistently exhausted. To fight the exhaustion, you consume anything that will be a pick me up.

Welcome to full-bore burnout. Your exhaustion is crippling. You look at yourself as a failure and are very pessimistic about most things. You are so out of control of your personal life that you may sink into your work life all the more. You will undoubtedly feel burnout in the many different physical forms of disease, including headaches, intestinal problems, chronic fatigue, frequent illness, and worse. You could have neurological issues that handicap your life. The mental side of this is that you are incapable of thinking clearly. You may become paranoid, think everyone is against you, or become deeply cynical of life, others, and God Himself. If you knew a way out, there is no way you could muster up the strength and fortitude to work yourself out of your toxic pattern of living. You are stuck, and many times, some people will develop anxiety and panic attacks. You isolate physically or emotionally because you have no more "bandwidth" for anyone else's issues. You are overwhelmed and cannot think of anything that brings enjoyment to your life.

Some may look for a complete change in their life, including their jobs, the place they live, and their spouse. You are trying to get away with any last bit of energy, or you may have become apathetic and rendered yourself to be a victim of work and life.

There is a way out of all this, but it is more complex than breathing techniques, a trip to the day spa, and a cup of tea with chamomile and ashwagandha. If you are experiencing burnout or have chronic stress leading to burnout, you need a brain rewrite, and you may need to take an extended break from the incredible responsibilities that you bear. There are plenty of websites with five steps to healing, but you will probably need more than that. Like an overfat person who goes on a diet and loses 50 pounds only to gain it all back because the mindset that got them into their overfat state never changed. First, I implore you to address this before something serious happens to your health, marriage, or job. If you don't see an "S" on your chest, you will need some help. Sage friends are good, but a therapist or a life coach would be most helpful. The therapist can help you understand why and how you got into this situation and what it is doing to your life that you are not seeing. A coach can take you into your desired future. Whatever the case, don't dismiss it like it is no big deal.

I encourage you to take the 3 assessments and think deeply about your life with great honesty.