

# Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

# What Is Burnout?



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## Description

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Everyone has bad days at work, and problems with our workload, role, organization, or personal life can be difficult. For most of us, stress is an unavoidable part of work that comes and goes. In fact, a little stress can sometimes help us focus and perform at our best.

But what if every workday is a bad day? When work-related stress becomes too great or goes on for too long, it can lead to serious problems. 'Burnout' describes what happens when we feel so depleted by the stresses of work that we struggle to perform. It's as if our energy for work is 'extinguished' by prolonged stress, leaving us feeling emotionally drained, unmotivated, and ineffective.

The *What Is Burnout?* information handout is designed to help clients suffering from burnout understand more about their condition. It includes:

- A summary of the most common symptoms of burnout.
- Descriptions of what it can feel like to have burnout.
- A description of why burnout might not get better by itself.
- A brief overview of evidence-based psychological treatments for burnout.

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# Instructions

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Our 'What Is ...?' series is designed to support your clients:

- **Reassure and encourage optimism.** Many clients find it hugely reassuring to know there is a name for what they are experiencing, and that there are evidence-based psychological models and treatments specifically designed to help.
- **Scaffold knowledge.** These handouts are perfect during early stages of therapy to help your clients understand how their symptoms fit together and make sense.
- **Signposting.** If you're just seeing a client briefly for assessment, or you have a curious client who wants to know more, these resources can be a helpful part of guiding them to the right service.

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# What Is Burnout?

You feel exhausted, depleted, and extremely fatigued.

Your attitude towards work is increasingly negative, pessimistic, and cynical.

You feel ineffective, unproductive, and unhappy in your role.

These difficulties sometimes spill out of work, affecting your health, mood, and relationships.

**Burnout is a serious work-related problem that leaves you feeling exhausted, ineffective, and unmotivated.**

When people experience stress for long periods of time, they sometimes reach the point of burnout – a state of extreme emotional exhaustion. Burnout is a gradual process that usually arises at work, and leaves you feeling depleted, ineffective, and deeply unhappy. This can cause other problems with your mental health, physical health, relationships, and day-to-day life.

## The core of burnout: emotional exhaustion

Burnout is more than just tiredness – it's an overwhelming and persistent exhaustion that you experience emotionally, mentally, and physically. When you feel this way, engaging with your work is extremely difficult.

I've lost the energy I once had for my job.



Getting through each day is such a struggle.



I feel so drained all the time.



## Work-related exhaustion gets stuck in place for a few reasons:

### Stressful work environments

Working in an environment where there are overwhelming demands can be extremely stressful. If this leads to exhaustion, you might try to manage the situation by continuing to overwork. Alternatively, you might feel so exhausted or cynical about the situation that change seems impossible. Either way, nothing improves and work continues to burn you out.

### Unhelpful ways of coping

If you feel emotionally exhausted, you might cope by becoming detached at work, withdrawing from colleagues, or soothing yourself in other ways (e.g., using alcohol). Unfortunately, these coping strategies often lead to more problems, interfere with your performance, and trigger worry and self-criticism. As your work-related stresses increase, so does your exhaustion.

### Inability to recharge

Emotional exhaustion can make you protective of the energy you have left. You might stop doing things you enjoy outside of work, withdraw from your friends and family, or struggle with your sleep. All these things make it harder for you to recuperate and replenish your energy. When you don't take the opportunity to enjoy yourself and recharge, burnout continues.

## Treatment for burnout

Burnout can be an issue for individuals, teams, or whole organizations. For this reason, treatment might involve one-to-one work or working with groups of employees. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective psychological therapy that can help individuals address the thoughts and behaviors that contribute to burnout and prevent it from coming back.

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