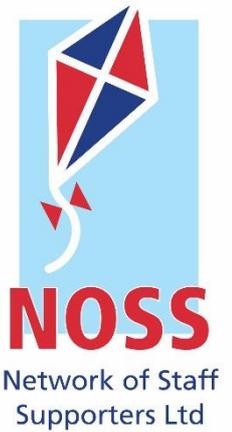




“In a Nutshell”

## Burnout (improving emotional health)



If constant stress has you feeling disillusioned, helpless, and completely worn out, you may be suffering from burnout. When you are burned out, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks bleak, and it is difficult to muster up the energy to care—let alone do something about your situation. The unhappiness and detachment burnout causes can threaten your job, your relationships, and your health. But burnout can be healed. If you recognize the signs and symptoms of burnout in its early stages, simple stress management strategies may be enough to solve the problem. In the later stages of burnout, recovery may take more time and effort, but you can still regain your balance by reassessing your priorities, making time for yourself, and seeking support.

### What is burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place. Burnout reduces your productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, you may feel like you have nothing more to give. Most of us have days when we feel bored, overloaded, or unappreciated; when the dozen balls we keep in the air are not noticed, let alone rewarded; when dragging ourselves out of bed requires the determination of Hercules. If you feel like this most of the time, however, you may be flirting with burnout.

You may be on the road to burnout if:

- Every day is a bad day.
- Caring about your work or home life seems like a total waste of energy.
- You're exhausted all the time.
- The majority of your day is spent on tasks you find either mind-numbingly dull or overwhelming.
- You feel like nothing you do makes a difference or is appreciated.

The negative effects of burnout spill over into every area of life – including your home and social life. Burnout can also cause long-term changes to your body that make you vulnerable to illnesses like colds and flu. Due to its many consequences, it is important to deal with burnout right away.

### Dealing with Burnout: The "Three R" Approach

- **Recognise** – Watch for the warning signs of burnout
- **Reverse** – Undo the damage by managing stress and seeking support
- **Resilience** – Build your resilience by taking care of your physical and emotional health

### The difference between stress and burnout

- Burnout may be the result of unrelenting stress, but it isn't the same as too much stress. Stress, by and large, involves *too much*: too many pressures that demand too much of you physically and psychologically. Stressed people can still imagine, though, that if they can just get everything under control, they will feel better.
- Burnout, on the other hand, is about *not enough*. Being burned out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation, and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often don't see any hope of positive change in their situations.

If excessive stress is like drowning in responsibilities, burnout is being all dried up. One other difference between stress and burnout: While you are usually aware of being under a lot of stress, you do not always notice burnout when it happens.

### Causes of burnout

There are many causes of burnout. In many cases, burnout stems from the job. But anyone who feels overworked and undervalued is at risk for burnout – from the hardworking office worker who hasn't had a vacation or a raise in two years to the frazzled stay-at-home mom struggling with the heavy responsibility of taking care of three kids, the housework, and her aging father. Burnout is not caused solely by stressful work or too many responsibilities. Other factors contribute to burnout, including your lifestyle and certain personality traits. What you do in your downtime and how you look at the world can play just as big of a role in causing burnout as work or home demands.

### **Work-related causes of burnout**

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work.
- Lack of recognition or rewards for good work.
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations.
- Doing work that is monotonous or unchallenging
- Working in a chaotic or high pressure environment

### **Lifestyle causes of burnout**

- Working too much, without enough time for relaxing and socializing
- Being expected to be too many things to too many people.
- Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others
- Not getting enough sleep
- Lack of close, supportive relationships

### **Personality traits can contribute to burnout**

- Perfectionist tendencies; nothing is ever good enough
- Pessimistic view of yourself and the world
- The need to be in control; reluctance to delegate to others
- High-achieving, Type A personality

### **Warning signs and symptoms of burnout**

Burnout is a gradual process that occurs over an extended period of time. It does not happen overnight, but it can creep up on you if you are not paying attention to the warning signals. The signs and symptoms of burnout are subtle at first, but they get worse and worse as time goes on.

Think of the early symptoms of burnout as warning signs or red flags that something is wrong that needs to be addressed. If you pay attention to these early warning signs, you can prevent a major breakdown. If you ignore them, you will eventually burn out.

### **Preventing burnout**

If you recognise the warning signs of impending burnout in yourself, remember that it will only get worse if you leave it alone. But if you take steps to get your life back into balance, you can prevent burnout from becoming a full-blown breakdown.

- **Start the day with a relaxing ritual.** Rather jumping out of bed as soon as you wake up, spend at least fifteen minutes meditating, writing in your journal, doing gentle stretches, or reading something that inspires you.
- **Adopt healthy eating, exercising, and sleeping habits.** When you eat right, engage in regular physical activity, and get plenty of rest, you have the energy and resilience to deal with life's hassles and demands.
- **Set boundaries.** Do not overextend yourself. Learn how to say "no" to requests on your time. If you find this difficult, remind yourself that saying "no" allows you to say "yes" too
- **Take a daily break from technology.** Set a time each day when you completely disconnect. Put away your laptop, turn off your phone, and stop checking email.
- **Nourish your creative side.** Creativity is a powerful antidote to burnout. Try something new, start a fun project, or resume a favourite hobby. Choose activities that are not work related.

- **Learn how to manage stress.** When you are on the road to burnout, you may feel helpless. But you have a lot more control over stress than you may think. Learning how to manage stress can help you regain your balance.

### **Recovering from burnout**

Sometimes it is too late to prevent burnout – you are already past the breaking point. If that is the case, it is important to take your burnout very seriously. Trying to push through the exhaustion and continue as you have been will only cause further emotional and physical damage. While the tips for preventing burnout are still helpful at this stage, recovery requires additional steps.

#### **Burnout recovery strategy 1: Slow down**

When you have reached the end stage of burnout, adjusting your attitude or looking after your health is not going to solve the problem. You need to force yourself to slow down or take a break. Cut back whatever commitments and activities you can. Give yourself time to rest, reflect, and heal.

#### **Burnout recovery strategy 2: Get support**

When you are burned out, the natural tendency is to protect what little energy you have left by isolating yourself. But your friends and family are more important than ever during difficult times. Turn to your loved ones for support. Simply sharing your feelings with another person can relieve some of the burden.

#### **Burnout recovery strategy 3: Reevaluate your goals and priorities**

Burnout is an undeniable sign that something important in your life is not working. Take time to think about your hopes, goals, and dreams. Are you neglecting something that is truly important to you? Burnout can be an opportunity to rediscover what really makes you happy and to change course accordingly.

#### **Recovering from burnout: Acknowledge your losses**

Burnout brings with it many losses, which can often go unrecognised. Unrecognised losses trap a lot of your energy. It takes a tremendous amount of emotional control to keep yourself from feeling the pain of these losses. When you recognise these losses and allow yourself to grieve them, you release that trapped energy and open yourself to healing.

- Loss of the idealism or dream with which you entered your career
- Loss of the role or identity that originally came with your job
- Loss of physical and emotional energy
- Loss of friends, fun, and sense of community
- Loss of esteem, self-worth, and sense of control and mastery
- Loss of joy, meaning and purpose that make work – and life – worthwhile