



What's in this patient handout?

- An overview of burnout
- Causes and consequences
- Symptoms
- Treatment options
- Long term holistic treatment aims
- Nutritional, herbal and lifestyle recommendations

An overview of burnout

The term 'burnout' was first used by the American psychologist Herbert J Freudenberger in 1974. Burnout describes a work-related syndrome that results from prolonged response to chronic stressors in the job. Burnout is recognised by the WHO as an occupational phenomenon rather than a medical condition. Burnout can affect anyone who is exposed to continually high stress levels including overworked employees, students, parents or athletes.

Burnout is characterised by:

- Overwhelming exhaustion
- Feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job
- Sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment

The most common questionnaire to assess burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Questionnaires are helpful in differentiating burnout from depression, identifying the underlying causes and providing the basis for a personalised treatment approach.

Causes

- Exposure to prolonged periods of stress and work overload
- Feeling permanently overworked or under-challenged
- Dysfunctional workplace dynamics, conflict with colleagues
- Extreme commitment resulting in neglecting one's own needs
- Insufficient recognition and reward at the workplace
- Lack of control over workload and decisions

Consequences

- Anger and irritability
- Sadness
- Alcohol or other substance abuse
- High blood pressure, poor sleep quality

Symptoms

- Extreme physical and/or emotional exhaustion
- Defensive coping (e.g. cynicism, changes in attitudes)
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to cope
- Depersonalisation, feeling detached from life and ability to control life
- Feeling a lack of personal accomplishment, inefficiency, emotional distance
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling listless and lack creativity, loss of motivation, reduced performance
- Unexplained gastrointestinal problems or stomach pain, headaches, insomnia

The symptoms of severe burnout often overlap with other mental or psychosomatic illnesses such as depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety disorders or medication side effects. It is therefore essential to seek medical care to receive a conclusive diagnosis.

Treatment options

- The short-term treatment goal for burnout is to lighten the workload and provide a period of rest.

Goal	Actions
Change detrimental work patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decrease workload• Ensure regular breaks, ideally away from your desk• Avoid working overtime• Improve work-life balance• Delegate work if possible
Develop coping skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve time management skills• Conflict resolution if appropriate• Restructure cognitive perception• Efficiency, resiliency and skills training• Setting limits and boundaries
Obtain social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication with supervisors, co-workers• Seek support from family members and friends
Promote optimal health, fitness and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular physical activity• Optimal balanced nutrition• Avoid processed and junk foods• Nurture hobbies and other personal interests• Engage in relaxing activities• Spend time outdoors
Develop a better self-understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-analytic techniques• Counselling or other therapy• Peer support groups• Reflect on life-priorities, values

Long-term holistic treatment aims

- Support nervous system for improved stress response
- Support healthy immune system function to avoid opportunistic illnesses

Nutritional, herbal and lifestyle recommendations

- 'Eat the rainbow': include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Antioxidants may help reduce free radicals and decrease oxidative stress
- B-Vitamins and coenzyme Q10 for energy production
- Omega-3 fatty acids for nervous system/brain function (fish, seafood, nuts, chia/flax seeds)
- Magnesium for times of increased physical/mental stress (nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains, leafy greens and bananas)
- Vitamin C may help to support the stress response
- Avoid caffeine within 8 hours of bedtime. Try dandelion coffee or caffeine free herbal teas
- Withania (Ashwagandha) may act as an adaptogen to help modulate the stress response
- Siberian ginseng may be beneficial in times of chronic stress exposure and nervous exhaustion
- Meditation provides a safe and effective strategy when dealing with work stress
- Acupuncture and massage, with or without aromatherapy
- Engage in social interaction and laughter

Seek medical care

- Contact your healthcare professional if you feel you may have burnout to ensure appropriate support.

Disclaimer: This is not an all-inclusive comprehensive list of information.

Consult a qualified healthcare provider before starting any therapy. Application of clinical judgement is necessary.