

Burned Out at Work?

If we haven't experienced the symptoms of worker burnout, we certainly know someone who has.

Being exhausted all the time.

Struggling to complete job tasks.

Feeling disconnected from work.



Burnout is a lot more common than we once thought, and now it's gotten a nod of recognition from the World Health Organization. The WHO recently included [work burnout as a syndrome](#) in its handbook of medical diagnoses, the International Classification of Diseases Handbook. The agency described the condition as "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed."

Inclusion in the guidebook doesn't surprise [Dr. E. Robert Schwartz](#), a family medicine expert with the University of Miami Health System. He has seen the number of burnout cases steadily grow since he began practicing. "I see so many

people who suffer not just the physical problems but also the mental exhaustion that comes with it," he says. "It's a sign of our times."

Dr. Schwartz is not alone when he points the finger at our 24/7 lifestyle. The hustle culture means we're "living at a much faster pace, getting up earlier and staying up later, spending more and more time on social media and email, always trying to get things done."

Work burnout is not job-specific

This always-on mentality is further aggravated by the expectations that we must react immediately to whatever we read or see. "Everyone wants an answer right now," he says, "even if they don't really need it."

Humans, however, aren't built for this constant stimuli, and they're reacting to it in unhealthy ways. They're irritable, angry, not eating properly, and more prone to lash out. And while he sees more professionals suffering from work burnout, "it's really across the broad spectrum of people. It affects the average working person, too."

Stress, of course, is part of everyday life on the job. A looming deadline. A new software system. Heavier workload after layoffs. Lack of support from managers. In fact, worker burnout can happen even when you love your job. But "technology has ramped up the expectation beyond what we can manage," Dr. Schwartz explains.

Numbers underscore his assessment. A 2018 Gallup study of 7,500 full-time employees found that 23 percent reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, and an additional 44 percent reported this feeling sometimes. That desperate, heavy feeling also comes at a cost — an estimated \$125 billion to \$190 billion in health-care spending each year, according to the Harvard Business Review. These costs include treatment for the major health risks linked to job burnout:

coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, gastrointestinal issues, and high cholesterol.

Minimize your stress

While some companies are taking steps to deal with the crisis of worker burnout, Dr. Schwartz says there are ways employees can minimize the harmful effects of [workplace stress](#):

- **Get enough sleep.** “You have to make a conscious effort to prioritize sleep,” he says, adding that the right amount of shut-eye – between 7 to 8 hours – helps people deal with challenges. To make sure you get those Zzzz’s, establish a routine by waking up at the same time each day. Turn off your devices a couple of hours before going to bed. And avoid caffeine in the late afternoon.
- **Move more.** Get your recommended 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week. If you can’t manage this, incorporate short segments of exercise into your daily routine by getting up from your seat and moving around your work area. Try some simple exercises at your desk.
- **Make time to relax.** You might do this by simply enjoying nature or a friend’s company. Some people swear by yoga or other mindful practices. The idea is to slow down and be present in the moment. When we never shift out of work, we may overreact to even minor obstacles.
- **Get creative.** A survey of more than 400 workers in all sorts of jobs found that picking up a creative hobby helped people recover from the demands of their career.
- **Know when to STOP.** An 80-hour-work week doesn’t make you more productive. In fact, science shows that productivity drops once you hit the

50-hour mark. So you may be working longer — but accomplishing less.

- **Take five.** If something or someone is upsetting you, Schwartz says, “all you might need to do is to walk away for a few minutes. Just take yourself out of the situation.”

While we can’t eliminate all stress from our jobs — or our lives — we can try to tame worker burnout. “I think the most important thing you can do is to become aware of when and what stresses you and then go from there to take the necessary steps to reduce it.”



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