



LAGOS STATE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Staff Welfare Fact Sheet: The Burnout Cycle

Burnout Syndrome develops gradually over a period of time. Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger and his colleague Gail North divided the process into twelve phases. According to them, these phases do not necessarily follow one another in any particular order. *Some may skip a phase while others may experience several phases simultaneously.* The experience and duration vary per patient/person.

Phases of the burnout cycle.

A compulsion to prove oneself: This starts with excessive ambition: the desire to prove oneself which then turns into grim determination and compulsion. The need to prove to their colleagues – and above all themselves – that they are doing an excellent job.

Working harder: To meet their personal high expectations, some may take on more work and become obsessed with handling everything themselves. This is usually done to validate the notion of “irreplaceability”.

Neglecting personal needs: Basic necessities like sleeping eating or social gatherings become unimportant. Schedules leave no time except for work and personal needs are sacrificed to meet these schedules.

Displacement of conflicts: Conflict avoidance emerges. When problems arise, they will rather avoid dealing with the root cause of the distress, as it may seem threatening. Sometimes, they lack the ability to reflect and determine the source of the problem.

Revision of values: A change in insight occurs due to isolation and denial of physical needs. The only standard for their self-worth becomes their work, as thoughts of once important things like friends and hobbies are dismissed. They become increasingly emotionally blunted.

Denial of emerging problems: They become intolerable and begin perceiving colleagues as lazy, stupid and undisciplined. They develop cynicism and aggression.

Withdrawal: Their social isolation increases and so does their feeling of being walled-off. They begin to feel a loss of direction. Many may seek release through alcohol and drugs, or other reckless behavior.

Obvious behavioral changes: A significant change in their behavior is observable and colleagues are no longer able to overlook this change. A sense of worthlessness is felt at an increasing rate.

Depersonalization: They lose contact with themselves and accomplishing tasks become a series of mechanical functions. Thoughts and feelings begin to seem unreal and they neither see themselves nor others as valuable.

Inner emptiness: Their sense of inner emptiness grows progressively. To overcome this feeling, they desperately seek out some activity to dull out their feelings. They begin to overcompensate on such activities as eating, sleeping, sexual activities as well as alcohol and drug consumption.

Depression: Burnout syndrome corresponds to depression. The overwhelmed ones become indifferent, hopeless, exhausted and believe the future holds nothing for them. Any of the symptoms of depression may become manifest as life loses meaning.

Burnout Syndrome: Almost all burnout victims now have suicidal thoughts to escape their situation. A few actually make attempts. Ultimately, they suffer severe mental and physical breakdown.

10 Practical Suggestions for Managing Stress

1. **Learn to relax:** Take “mini breaks” throughout the day. Find a comfortable sitting position. Once settled, take a deep breath in, hold it and then exhale very slowly. This practice is called the diaphragmatic breathing and you should repeat it as many times as you can. At the same time, let your shoulder muscles droop, unstick your tongue from the ceiling of your upper mouth and say something positive like ‘I am r-e-l-a-x-e-d’. Also be sure to get sufficient night rest.
2. **Practice Acceptance:** Learn to accept those things you cannot control. Many people get distressed over things that cannot be changes, so it is best to manage your stress by focusing on the changes you can make, or the things you can control.
3. **Talk rationally to yourself:** In any stressful situation, think through what challenges you are facing and approach it calmly and firmly. If the challenges come from you, rather than condemn yourself, learn from the error and plan for corrections. If the challenges come from others, there is little one can do about it except to avoid being stressed out by it. Remember to avoid perfectionism. Set realistic and attainable goals. Remember that everyone makes errors, so go easy on yourself and others. Break tasks into smaller units which will help in prioritization and meeting targets.
4. **Get Organized:** Develop a realistic schedule of daily activities which include time for work, sleep, relationships, relaxation and recreation. Use your time and energy as efficiently as possible. Improve your physical surroundings at home and at the office.
5. **Exercise:** Physical activity has been shown to provide relief from stress. Develop a regular exercise schedule to help reduce the effects of stress before it becomes distress. Schedule about 10 – 20 minutes exercise daily. It could be a short walk around your neighborhood, or using a skipping rope, or using the flight of stairs at the office. Any activity which raises the heart rate and respiratory rate is preferable.
6. **Reduce Time Urgency:** Practice the notion of “pace, not race’. Plan your schedule ahead of time. Allow plenty of time to get things done, so you don’t get caught up in a rush. Learn to take things slower so you don’t worry so much about time.
7. **Disarm yourself:** Adjust your approach to a program according to its demands. Every situation in life does not require you to be competitive, so guard against this.
8. **Quiet Time:** Balance your family, social and work demands with special private times. Hobbies are good antidotes for daily pressures. Unwind by having your special quiet moment. It may be while taking a quiet stroll or listening to calming music.
9. **Watch your habits:** Eat a balanced diet for all the necessary energy you will need during the day. Avoid non-prescription medication and alcohol use. You need to be physically and mentally prepared to deal with stress. Be mindful of the effects of excessive caffeine and sugar on nervousness. Put out the cigarettes – they restrict blood circulation and affect the stress response.
10. **Talk to friends:** Friends can be good medicine. Daily doses of conversation, regular social engagements and occasional sharing of deep feelings and thoughts can reduce stress quite nicely. Letters and journaling are another form of talking.

Self-Care List

These ideas vary by ability, financial ability and other factors. This is meant to give ideas for self-care that will work best for you. Self-care is however not limited to ideas in this list alone and can include any practice or action that will preserve or improve your health and well-being, particularly during periods of stress.

1. Praise yourself. This can be specific (I handled the situation well) or general (I am important)
2. Do a breathing exercise. Inhale, hold, exhale
3. Draw and color
4. Eat healthy food and fruits
5. Sleep
6. Write a journal of your daily activities or thoughts
7. Talk to a friend
8. Compliment your colleague
9. Exercise
10. Shower or take a long bath
11. Buy yourself something small and nice
12. Cry it out
13. Meditate
14. Sing
15. Dance
16. Volunteer to a worthy cause
17. Accept corrections and learn from mistakes
18. Have some alone time
19. Call an old friend
20. Rearrange your space at the office
21. Clear out your closet/wardrobe
22. Give out unused items from your house
23. Watch something funny
24. Go to the movies
25. Listen to music
26. Refuse a favor if you don't feel up to it
27. Ask for help
28. Listen to your intuition
29. Take a digital detox
30. Do some office/home exercises
31. Play
32. Watch the sunset
33. Set achievable goals
34. Accept and learn from mistakes
35. Cut away from toxic relationships
36. Drink 8 liters of water daily
37. Speak up when someone bothers you
38. Show kindness to others
39. Write down 5 things you love about yourself
40. Picture yourself where you are most at peace
41. Learn something new
42. Name 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you feel, 2 things you smell and 1 thing you taste
43. Listen to a podcast
44. Do absolutely nothing
45. Listen to a relaxation tape
46. Talk to yourself nicely
47. Give yourself a head massage
48. Try something new
49. Donate to a charity
50. Find a new relaxing hobby
51. Connect with family and friends
52. Watch a funny movie
53. Learn to say NO
54. Express your feelings
55. Accept compliments
56. Create new experiences
57. Smile more
58. Do some reading
59. Take a short stroll
60. Get a new hairstyle or haircut

ADD YOUR CREATIVE IDEAS TO THE LIST TOO:

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| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

THERAPEUTIC SELF-CARE



*EXPLORING ONE'S FEELINGS/EMOTIONS

1. Notice how you feel
2. Name your emotion: What is it? What word best describes it?
3. Accept the emotion: It's a normal emotion. What prompted it?
4. Investigate the emotion: How intense is it? Is it proportionate to the situation? Does it have any physical effect? How is your breathing?
5. Release the emotion: Breathe deeply and slowly. Don't judge yourself. Take a moment to yourself. Find your balance and return to your happy place