

## Preventing Burnout and Managing Stress

Most people have days when they feel stressed and a bit overwhelmed with life, but what about when you feel total exhaustion, no motivation, disengaged, hopeless, and a complete lack of care? You may be experiencing burnout, especially if you feel this way more days than not. Stress isn't necessarily a bad thing, and it can help motivate us to act, but prolonged stress can take its toll. It's important to learn how to balance between times of higher stress and times of relaxation. The difference between stress and burnout is that people who are stressed usually have hope that if they can get everything under control, they'll be better, but people who are burned out often don't have any hope of positive change.

You may be at risk of burnout if you are under a great deal of stress for long periods of time, feel overwhelmed with responsibilities, don't take time for self-care and relaxation, and have a limited support network. Burnout typically happens over time, and there are things you can do to address it whether you are just starting to feel too much stress or are at the point of burnout.

### Identify Your Body's Burnout Warning Signs

When you learn to notice and follow the warnings your body sends you that you need a break, you can start taking a more proactive approach to self-care. You can do something about your low energy levels before your battery completely runs out. Do you experience headaches, stomachaches, irritability, tiredness, or changes in appetite? Do you get a cold every time you finish a big, stressful project? Pay attention to your body and what it's telling you.

### Complete the Stress Cycle / Release the Stress

When you identify that your body is holding a lot of stress, it's important that you release it in healthy ways, especially if it's been building for a while. Some of the best ways to release stress are:

- Physical Activity (It's not just about going to the gym: jump, dance, stretch...)
- Creativity (making something)
- Laughing or crying
- Physical affection
- Deep breathing or meditation exercises

### Assemble Your Self-Care Support Squad

It's called self-care, but that doesn't mean you must do it all by yourself. You'll need the help of other people and things. Engage those around you and have them check in with you to ensure you are caring for yourself.

### Create Boundaries and Limits for Spending Your Energy

Boundaries don't have to be rigid. They can be the soft limits that slow you down before you crash. But to respect your limits, you first need to know what they are. Is it an earlier bedtime or maybe saying no to a fun night out and yes to a relaxing night in, despite your FOMO? Is it knowing the project you are working on will limit your ability to say yes to other projects? Is it setting a time limit when helping people you care about? It can be difficult in the moment, but you will thank yourself later for making yourself a priority.

If you are struggling with stress or burnout, consider reaching out to ERC. Meeting with a counselor could be the additional support you need to start caring for yourself in new ways and develop some healthy habits.

Sources: (1) Smith, M., Segal, J., & Robinson, L. (2020, October). *Burnout prevention and treatment*. HelpGuide. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery.htm>. (2) Nagoski, E., & Nagoski, A. (2019). *Burnout: The secret to unlocking the stress cycle*. New York: Ballantine Books.

## HOW TO USE YOUR EAP BENEFIT:

**ERC: Counselors & Consultants** is your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. For additional information, visit our website [ERCincorp.com](http://ERCincorp.com) or call 1-800-222-8590.