

# Are You Suffering from Burnout?

Burnout was officially classified as a disease by the World Health Organisation in 2019, but its definition was more specific to the workplace and described as “a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. Now the term is being applied more generically to describe people’s feelings brought on by the external state of the world.

We have all lived through nearly two years of the pandemic, and things still feel different to a typical year. Some people are feeling great and optimistic. However, many are saying they feel flat and generally demotivated.

## WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout can look and feel slightly different depending on the person, but there are some common symptoms to look for:

### You avoid the news

You find yourself deliberately skipping the first 10-15 minutes of the news — or the entirety of it — to avoid the reports on Covid-19 and other potentially depressing headlines.

### Feeling cynical and exhausted

You might realise that you’ve become angrier about the world recently, or just more impatient in general. This, along with the continued anxiety caused by the pandemic, has made you more depressed and tired — seemingly all the time!

### Feeling emotionally numb

Stress might have motivated you in the early days of the pandemic to scramble for solutions to make lockdown more tolerable, but now you are beginning to question why you care and whether you should pay less attention to the pandemic. This general stance towards Covid-19 can then begin to spill into everyday life.

### A sense of hopelessness

You feel like you’ve done everything right for years. You’ve socially distanced, worn a mask, been vaccinated and followed ever-changing local guidelines and yet, the pandemic is still very much impacting your life. Over time, this can make you feel more negative and hopeless.

### Anxious about the future

You may have made previous predictions about when the pandemic might be over, but you are still no closer to knowing exactly when things are going to go back to ‘normal’. This can cause a sense of worry related to your own future or the future of your community and the wider world.

## WHAT CAUSES BURNOUT?

There are two main reasons why you may be experiencing burnout.

### A prolonged sense of worry

Fear and anxiety are used as evolutionary tools to deal with perceived threats. Under these conditions, our brain actions a ‘fight or flight’ response, so that we protect ourselves in some way shape or form. But, we’ve dealt with the constant threat of Covid-19 for so long that we no longer trust our brains when they tell us we’re under attack. Furthermore, our bodies are not designed to sustain high levels of anxiety for long periods of time without fatiguing.

## FIND OUT MORE

## ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM BURNOUT?

### Psychological hibernation

After spending an increasing amount of our time at home and away from face-to-face interaction, psychological hibernation can begin to come to the fore. This is where the brain is not working at the same level due to an extended lack of external stimuli. When we go back out and meet more people on a regular basis, it can be a large shock to the system — a shock that some people have a delayed reaction to. Because our brains have been used to processing at a different speed, this can make us feel a lot more tired than we may have been before the pandemic.

### STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH BURNOUT

To better deal with burnout, try the following techniques:

#### Keep your routines

During times of crisis, it's vitally important to hang onto your routines. Focus on the routines that are vital to your livelihood like healthy eating and good sleep. Other habits to maintain could be socialising or exercise.

#### Strengthen ties with your close relationships

Finding and fostering new relationships takes lots of time and energy. If you're feeling fatigued and overwhelmed, it may benefit you more to lean into established relationships.

#### Be aware of bad habits and addictions

One study entitled 'Covid-19 and implications for eating disorders' found that 38% of people being treated for an eating disorder had an increase in symptoms during the early part of the pandemic. Instead of allowing bad habits to creep into your life, look to do more relaxing and enjoyable activities, practice meditation or breathing exercises, or partake in mindfulness exercises such as writing down positive experiences during the day.

### Build on mental fitness

By setting achievable goals around activities like exercise, mindfulness, sleep, and connecting with nature, you can build your resilience to external changes. This is the theory behind mental fitness, that, just like an athlete builds their muscles to deal with the rigours of their sport, you can exercise your brain to help maintain and improve your overall mental wellbeing.

### WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

It's important to remember that you're not alone. Burnout is real and many people are dealing with it. Don't hesitate to reach out for help if you're experiencing depression and/or notice that your anxieties are affecting your wellbeing, your relationships, or your daily functioning.

You can access EAP support by:

- Calling **1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327)**
- Launching the **EAP Connect** smartphone app and tapping on Contact Us or Appointment

## FIND OUT MORE