

How to recover from burnout

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Work isn't always easy, but sometimes it becomes almost unbearable.

You might experience a constellation of symptoms, including [emotional](#)

[exhaustion](#), a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and cynicism, which affects how you interact with others in the workplace.

This is a condition known as burnout and though it's not listed in the diagnostic manual used by psychiatrists, it is a workplace-associated condition, according to the World Health Organization, said Dr. Jessi Gold, a member of the American Psychiatric Association's Council on Communications.

"There are lots of reasons why it happens. It depends on the person and how work is impacting them," said Gold, who is also an assistant professor of psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

What is burnout?

Burnout can come from a mismatch between what was expected in a job and what it really is, such as more paperwork than helping people, Gold said.

"That mismatch can create burnout pretty easily," Gold said. "And not doing the things that bring you meaning and purpose can as well."

Lack of control can also be an issue. So can a dysfunctional environment with a micromanaging boss or a workplace bully, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#), while unclear job expectations and a work-life imbalance can also be factors.

The pandemic may have made matters worse. A recent [survey](#) found 52% of workers reported experiencing burnout, 9 percentage points higher than before the pandemic.

Burnout symptoms

Some who experience burnout may not realize that's what's happening until they've reached the too exhausted to function stage, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

Some symptoms, according to Gold and the [National Library of Medicine](#) include:

- Emotional exhaustion that might feel like physical exhaustion
- Dissatisfaction with work
- Reduced workplace performance
- Having out-of-proportion feelings about work tasks
- Giving up doing the things that you enjoy outside of work
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Sadness, anger and irritability
- Medical conditions such as [heart disease](#), [high blood pressure](#) and type 2 diabetes
- Alcohol or substance misuse

Burnout may look like depression, but it's more a response to workplace circumstances, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

How to recover from burnout

How you recover from burnout might look different, depending on who you are and the techniques you find helpful. Some ideas include:

- **Peer support:** Having a colleague you can be honest with can help the workplace feel less lonely. Supportive leadership also helps, Gold said. It may be possible to find compromises or change expectations. Employee assistance programs may provide

the support you need, according to Mayo Clinic.

- **Shifting control where possible:** Perhaps certain days of the week seem like too much, so maybe you can rearrange parts of your schedule to balance the week more, Gold suggested. "Some of that requires reflecting on where you're getting your energy from and where you find meaning in what you're doing," Gold said. If you love one part of your work and hate another, consider how you can balance the two.
- **Leave work at work:** Some people have rituals, such as their commute, to "take off the workday jacket," Gold said. Others may feel better after an activity that separates the two parts of the day, like going for a run. "It's pretty easy for work to bleed into all areas of your life, especially if you have things about your job that you like or that you get excitement from," Gold said. "So you just have to find time to realize that your work self is not your entire self, and you have to find ways to fulfill yourself in other aspects."
- **Finding coping skills that work for you:** People may relate to certain [coping skills](#) more than they do to others. Fortunately, there are many options. For some, that's taking time for meditation or mindfulness. Transcendental meditation was found to decrease [burnout](#) in doctors, according to research published recently in the [Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions](#). Exercise can also help reduce stress. Someone else might schedule a massage. Another option is journaling, Gold said. "Figuring that out and incorporating it after those bad times or at the end of the day if you have to, whatever that looks like so you have some time to focus on you," Gold said.
- **Get help:** This may include talking to a primary care doctor, seeking out therapy or finding a career coach, Gold said.

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