

Burnout During the Time of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our daily routines and the way we do our work. This can cause significant stress and make us all susceptible to burnout.

Burnout is a result of chronic work-related stress causing us to feel physically and emotionally exhausted and indifferent about our work. Ongoing oppression of and discrimination against workers of color and other marginalized groups can also cause chronic stress and lead to burnout.

Unmanaged burnout can severely undermine our health and well-being. It can increase our risk of getting sick and developing chronic conditions such as depression, alcohol and substance misuse, and high blood pressure. It can negatively impact our home and social life.

The information provided here can help you cope more effectively and limit your risk for burnout.

Be aware of the signs and symptoms of burnout

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of burnout, commonly a combination of general and work-related chronic stress reactions, is the first step to managing it.

Work-related signs and symptoms

- Feeling negative and disillusioned about your work
- Becoming irritable or impatient with coworkers, customers and clients
- Difficulties with starting or finishing tasks on time and making mistakes
- Lacking motivation, feeling disengaged
- Not getting satisfaction from achievements
- Taking sick days more often than you normally would
- Thinking about quitting

Other signs and symptoms of chronic stress

- Feeling stressed, worried and anxious, overwhelmed, frustrated, sad, hopeless or depressed
- Exhaustion
- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel anything

Common causes of burnout

Elements of a workplace that may cause burnout include: lack of control, unclear job expectations, dysfunctional dynamics, oppressive workplace, monotonous tasks, chaotic work environment, high workload, and work-life imbalance.

We face additional causes of burnout because of the pandemic and teleworking, such as:

- Concern about the risk of exposure to the virus
- Lack of boundaries between work and home life and the resulting lack of downtime
- Using new communication tools and dealing with technical difficulties
- Taking care of personal and family needs while working, such as home schooling children and checking in on or caring for older adults
- Feeling that you are not contributing enough
- Uncertainty about the future of your workplace and/or employment
- Lack of social support and feedback

Take these steps to prevent burnout

Optimize your workspace: Designate a space for each family member to work and learn. Make your workspace comfortable and ideally separate from your after-work activities.

Control your day: Have a consistent daily routine, set boundaries on work hours, take periodic breaks, plan and prioritize, maintain a positive attitude, and ask for help when needed.

Stay connected: Communicate with your team and co-workers regularly, and stay connected with your social support system.

Keep your body healthy and strong: Periodically get up to stretch and move around, exercise, get fresh air, get enough sleep, meditate, eat well, and stay hydrated.

Keep your mind strong: Know where your stress comes from, be aware of your stress reactions, manage your stress with healthy strategies that work for you, and do things you enjoy.

Make your voice heard: If discriminatory and abusive behaviors cause, or contribute to, your feeling stressed, don't suffer in silence. Reach out to others who may be similarly affected and join forces to make your voice heard. Contact workplace, government or other organizations to seek just treatment, and advocate for systematic change.

Limit your media consumption: Set a specific time for checking the news, limit the time you spend on social media, and get your information from reliable sources.

What to do if experiencing burnout

Evaluate your options to reduce work stress. Talk openly with your supervisor about how the pandemic is affecting you and your work. Work together to find solutions.

Explore new ways for managing your stress. Talk to co-workers, friends or family, for insight into how you can reduce your stress or manage it more effectively.

Seek support. Don't wait until your symptoms worsen; ask about available support options and seek help. If you have access to an employee assistance program, take advantage of their services. Reach out to mental health resources and professionals.

Available support

NYC Well: If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or chat online.

NYC Commission for Human Rights: If you believe you have been discriminated against because of your immigration status, national origin, or membership in another protected class, contact the Commission at **311** or at 718-722-3131 to file a complaint of discrimination.

Worker Protection Hotline: Call **311** or 212-436-0381 with questions about reopening, health and safety guidelines for the workplace, or to report an employer that is not following reopening requirements.

NYC Hope: Home is not always a safe haven. You can get resources and services for yourself or to help those experiencing dating, domestic or gender-based violence. For more information, visit nyc.gov/nychope. For immediate safety planning, shelter or civil legal assistance, or counseling, call NYC's 24-hour Domestic Violence hotline at 800-621-4673 (TTY: 866-604-5350). For emergencies, call **911**.