

The Science of Burnout and How to Prevent It

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What IS burnout? ID the signs; Stress Physiology

2

Risk factors and causes

3

Cognitive prevention strategies

4

Behavioral prevention strategies

5

Resources



“Burnout” defined

Characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness in the workplace, and by chronic negative responses to stressful workplace conditions (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

- Not a distinct pathology ([Bianchi et al, 2015](#))
 - Job-related
 - A form of depression
 - Many overlapping symptoms



Measuring burnout



- Burnout assessments
 - Maslach Burnout Inventory – Human Services Survey
 - Emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization, Low sense of personal accomplishment
 - Professional Quality of Life Scale
 - Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress
- No agreed upon cut-scores
 - Some evidence for burnout profiling (e.g., Engaged, Ineffective, Overextended, Disengaged; Leiter & Maslach, 2016)

Burnout Prevalence

- 57% of tech workers [informally] report burnout
(n = 11k, 30 companies)
- 30% of UK HR directors reported that burnout was “rampant” in their orgs
- Helping professionals experience highest levels (21-67% extreme)



Burnout in Medical Profession= Moral Injury?

IT'S NOT BURNOUT, IT'S MORAL INJURY
MARCH 8TH, 2019

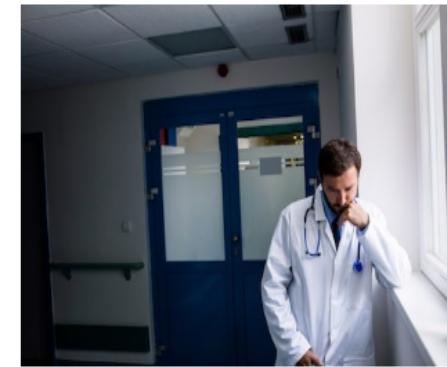


Leading health care organizations declare physician burnout as 'public health crisis'



For immediate release: January 17, 2019

Boston, MA – Burnout among the nation's physicians has become so pervasive that a new paper published today by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the



Signs of burnout

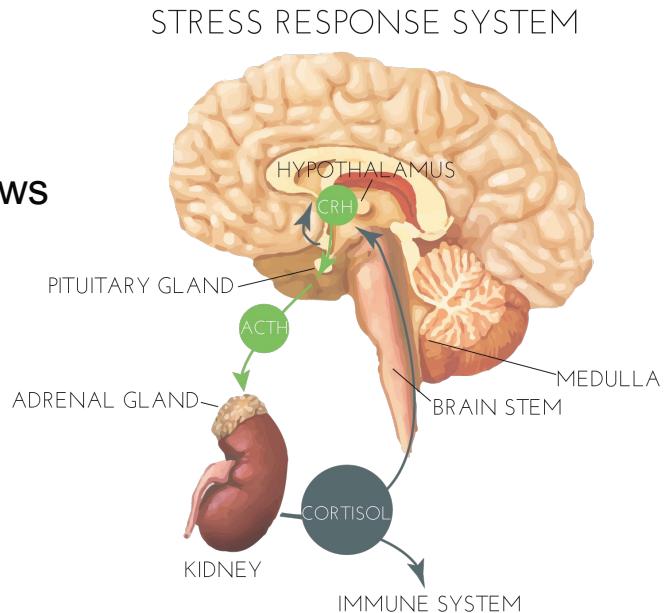
- Reduced efficiency and energy
- Lowered levels of motivation
- Increased errors
- Fatigue
- Headaches, muscle tension, GI problems
- Irritability, Increased frustration
- High levels of stress and anxiety
- Suspiciousness; cynicism
- Trouble sleeping
- Feelings trapped - lack of control
- Alcohol, substances to cope
- Feelings worried about work when not at work
- **Loss of interest - Apathy**



Chronic Stress Physiology & Consequences

Neurobiology of the stress response

- Hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis
- Sympathetic Nervous System → “gas-pedal” physiological changes.
 - Increased heart rate and blood pressure
 - Sweat secretion
 - Blood vessels and pupils dilate - blood flows to muscles
 - Digestion slows; Vision narrows
 - Breathing quickens



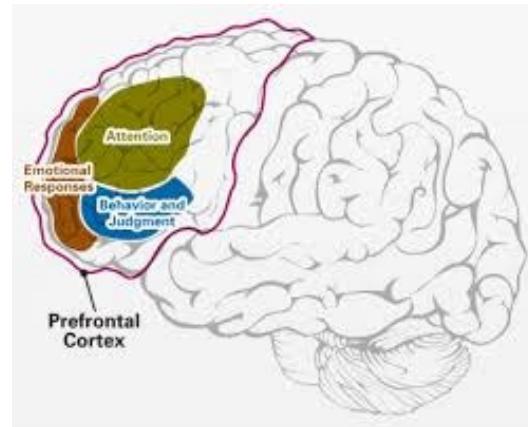
Your brain on stress

The Prefrontal Cortex

- Command center of higher level, executive functions
- Orchestrates critical thinking, planning, impulse control, and emotion regulation

Chronic Stress on the Brain:

- Cortical thinning
- Memory & attention difficulties



Symptoms of stress

- **Behavioral** - avoidance, irritability, sleep problems
- **Cognitive** - easily distracted, confused, thoughts of dread
- **Emotional** - anger, worry, depression
- **Cardiovascular** - chest pain, palpitations, cold extremities
- **Muscular** - tension headache, neck/back pain, shaky/strained voice
- **Skin** - flushing, hives/rashes/psoriasis, perspiration

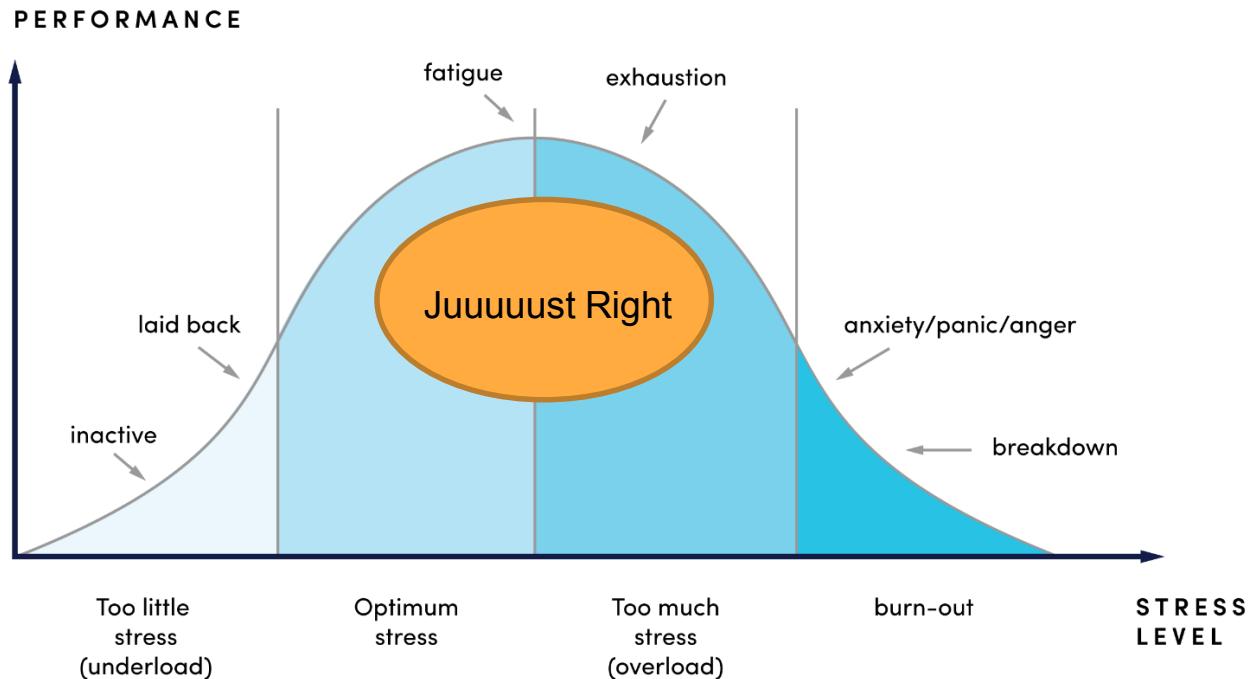


Why should we care about chronic stress and burnout?

Consequences

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Strained personal relationships
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Heart disease
- High cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes, especially in women
- Stroke
- Obesity
- Infertility
- Vulnerability to illnesses

Physiology of burnout



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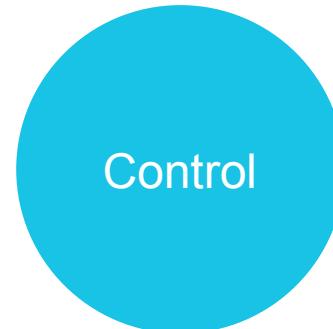
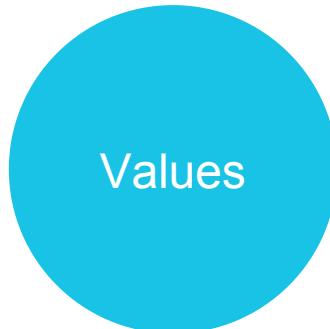


Individual level burnout risk factors

Personality Traits and Circumstances

- Perfectionism - the work is never good enough
- Personally identify strongly with work
- People-pleasing - being everything to everyone; gender differences
- Feel inadequate about ability to contribute
- Feel unappreciated
- Low social support
- Perceived lack of control - not enough flexibility or resources

Organizational level burnout risk factors



Cultural and systemic burnout risk factors

- Digital Divide - We're ALWAYS connected
- Collaborative Overload - we collaborate 50% more than we did 10 years ago
- US - works more than other developed countries
 - Women still do more domestic work while working ([UN, 2018](#))
- The Gospel of Hard Work - always need to be crushing it



How Millennials Became The Burnout Generation

I couldn't figure out why small, straightforward tasks on my to-do list felt so impossible. The answer is both more complex and far simpler than I expected.



Anne Helen Petersen

BuzzFeed News Reporter

Posted on January 5, 2019, at 10:31 a.m. ET

IDEAS

Workism Is Making Americans Miserable

For the college-educated elite, work has morphed into a religious identity—promising transcendence and community, but failing to deliver.

FEB 24, 2019



Derek Thompson

Staff writer at *The Atlantic*



The New York Times

Opinion

The Con of the Side Hustle

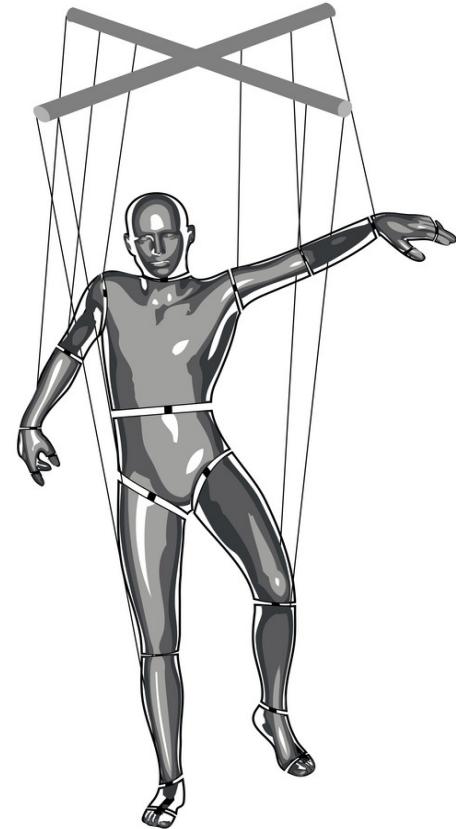
The language portraying second jobs as liberating or glamorous masks the reality of the insecure working lives of many Americans.

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Recognizing your autonomy

- One size does not fit all
- Suggestions, NOT prescriptive mandates
- Implementing new strategies will require course corrections



Burnout culprit #1: Our minds

Belief Systems

- Cognitive distortions
- Unhelpful thinking patterns



Common thinking traps

- Mind reading
- Fortune telling
- Black and White thinking
- The shoulds
- Catastrophizing
- Labeling “failure, loser, pathetic”
- Overgeneralizing (never, always)
- Emotional reasoning (emotions as truth)
- Discounting the positive



Examining Stuck Points

- Common logical fallacies that contribute to overcommitting
 - “My reputation and advancement hinges on saying yes.”
 - “I will look uncommitted”
 - “I won’t be able to get ahead”
 - “I need to be working all the time.”
 - “I will be a disappointment to others, I’ll let them down”
 - “I don’t have other options, I’m trapped here”
 - “I should be better at this.”
- Explore your motives for taking on too much or remaining in an unhealthy situation
 - What are your identity-based triggers?
 - Are decisions made with intention?
 - FOMO?
 - Are you struggling to relinquish control?

Cognitive Restructuring - Try it!

- What % do you actually believe it (0-100)?
What is the evidence to support it?
- If the thought were 100% true, how awful would it be?
Would you survive? Would the people in your life that you care about still love you?
- What would you tell a friend in this situation?
- In 5 years from now, what do you think you would have to say about this thought?
- How helpful or useful is this thought?
(1 = not helpful at all; 10 = extremely helpful)
- Is there a different way to think about or approach this thought?



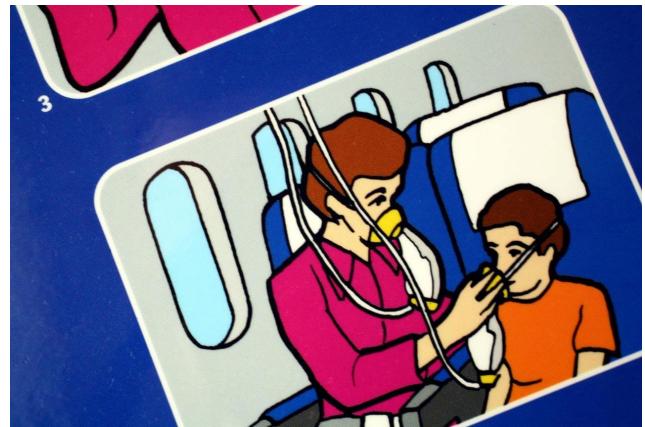
Self-compassion, what is that?

- Self compassion is a demonstration of kindness and understanding when confronted with personal failings
 - Self-kindness v Self-Judgement
 - Common humanity v Isolation
 - Mindfulness v Over-identification
- Self-compassion is not: self-confidence, making excuses, weakness, self-pity, self-indulgence
- Benefits of self-compassion over self-esteem ([Neff & Vonk, 2009](#)).



How do I practice self-compassion?

- Build a self-compassion workout routine: [training regimen](#)
- Be the whisper of a supportive friend - cultivate a coping voice
- Develop mantras -
“I am strong, I am human, I am OK”
- Cell-phone alarms for self-compassion breaks
- Act as if - radical self-acceptance



Put on your own
oxygen mask
before helping
those around you.

Visualize your inner critic

- Pull them out of your head for 5 mins
- Gender? Animal? Another version of you?
- What do they look like?
- What are they wearing?
- Posture? Body language?
- Tone of voice?
- Favorite lines?
- Age?
- Name?



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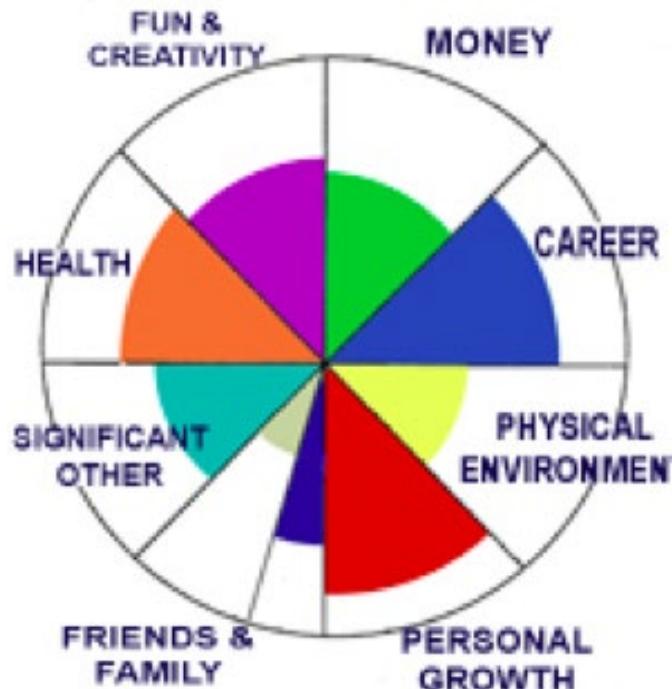
Burnout culprit #2: Our behaviors

- Unhelpful habits
- Maladaptive patterns of reacting



Remembering you are a whole person

- Fulfillment in multiple domains, in addition to work, is vital for building a meaningful life worth living.
- What areas do you want to work on?
- Where do your priorities lie?



Remembering you are a whole person

- Take a pulse on work-life balance
 - Quantify & track with a brief measure (e.g., This week, my work-life balance was 1 = poor to 5 = excellent).
 - SOPs that involve regularly scheduled well-being check-ins and project post-mortems
 - Reduce stigma and potential discomfort around asking for help and making changes

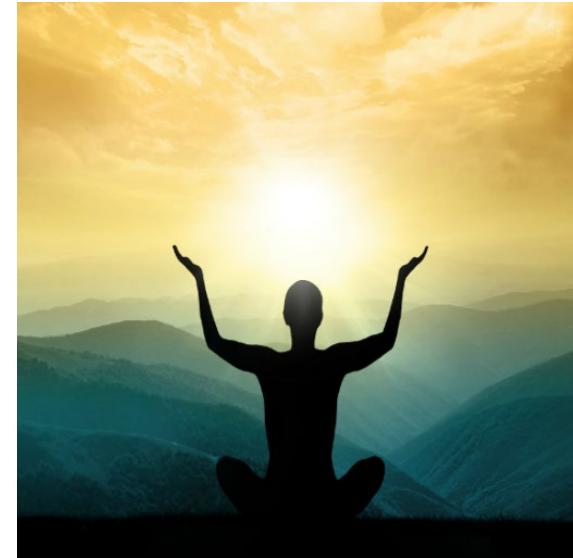


Taking time away



Taking time away

- What can you do to facilitate each others time off?
 - What constitutes urgent?
 - Cross-training
- Modeling self-care OOOWB
 - 1 day per quarter?
 - Remaining accountable and setting cultural norms



Keeping work @ work

- Boundaries allow us to “turn off” from work and feel at ease transitioning to other parts of our lives
- ID official business hours and make them known
 - Take a regularly scheduled lunch or exercise break
 - ID hours for collaborative vs independent work
 - Get creative! How can you inspire more helpful habits?
- Sunday scaries?
 - Plan for Monday on Friday



Keeping work @ work

- When you contact a colleague for non-urgent matters outside of their working hours, you are taking their attention away from their partner, children, friends, pets, and other restorative activities.
 - Is the interruption justified?
 - What is the power structure in which I reside?
 - Can I draft and delay?
 - How can I manage expectations?



Focusing on results, paying attention to what matters

- Do one thing - neuroscience [research](#) demonstrates that doing multiple things at once is rarely efficient or emotionally satisfying
 - Check email in batches
 - Sign off or silence Messenger/Slack?
 - Hide the [phone](#)
- Schedule time to think
- [How CEOs Manage Time](#)
- Or do nothing - [Niksen](#)
- Find your carrot to maximize efficiency
 - (e.g., 4 day work week [research](#))



Your call to action

I _____ commit to the below actions in order to proactively manage my mental health and well-being.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I _____ commit to supporting the well-being of my colleagues by

1

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Resources for promoting mental health in the workplace

- World Health Organization: Guidelines and models for promoting a mentally healthy workplace
 - http://www.who.int/mental_health/in_the_workplace/en/
 - http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/healthy_workplaces_model.pdf?ua=1
- Mental health communication tools for employees and managers
- Workplace prevention of mental health problems and burnout

Self Care Apps

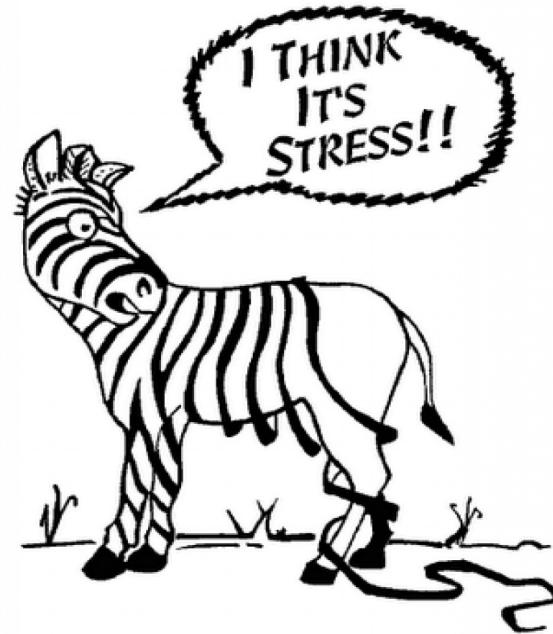


Sanity & Self



Shine

Questions? Thoughts? Ideas?



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