

## How to bounce back when the daily grind turns into burnout

By Teddi Nicolaus

**Y**our to-do list keeps growing. Your energy keeps shrinking. You tell yourself to push through — just one more task, one more day.

But instead of bouncing back, you feel drained, foggy and disconnected. Maybe you feel detached, even hopeless. Those feelings may be due to more than the normal everyday stresses of life. It could be burnout.

Burnout is not just something that happens at work. It can show up in many other parts of your life, such as caregiving, financial stress, parenting, going to school, volunteering, household tasks and personal relationships. Ongoing medical treatments can trigger burnout as well. If left unchecked, burnout can impact your well-being, relationships and ability to manage everyday life.

Burnout is more than just feeling stressed or tired. It's a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion that comes from feeling overwhelmed for too long, without enough time to recover.

"I think of it as when the gas tank is on empty — you have nothing else to give, and you are completely depleted," says Rachel Goldman, PhD, author of the book "When Life Happens" and assistant professor at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine. "It's what happens when we've been pushing through for too long without the support or tools to reset."

Burnout can occur wherever chronic stress exists, and it's often not just one big event that causes it, Goldman says. Maybe you're caring for a child or aging parent, navigating a health issue, going through a really tough time at work or school, or just coping with the constant juggle of daily responsibilities. "Burnout can sneak up on

you," Goldman says. "You may not notice it until you're already running on empty."

You might be suffering from burnout and not even know it. The symptoms don't look the same for everyone. Burnout can impact your thoughts, feelings and daily functioning. Symptoms can include constant fatigue, irritability and declining work performance. You may have trouble getting motivated, making decisions or concentrating on work that used to feel manageable. You might feel like your contributions don't matter.



Burnout can affect you physically too, leading to headaches, muscle tension, sleep problems, digestive issues and a weakened immune system, which can increase your risk of getting sick.

As daily life becomes more complicated, burnout is becoming more common. Demands pile up, keeping you in a state of constant stress and worry with no time to hit the off button. You may feel pressure to stay productive, respond quickly and keep up with endless responsibilities. At the same time, real rest can be hard to come by.

"Unfortunately, people associate rest as unproductive, so there are less opportunities for true rest and recovery, unless you are intentional about it," Goldman says. "Without intentional coping strategies, that chronic stress can build into burnout over time."

### Small changes, big difference

Burnout can happen to anyone. It's not a personal failure.

"It's a capacity issue," says clinical psychologist and burnout expert Manmeet Rattu, PsyD. "When stress is chronic, the nervous system shifts into survival mode. In that state, even simple tasks can feel overwhelming. Prevention starts with restoring capacity, not pushing harder."

The good news is that you don't have to overhaul your entire life to start feeling better. When it comes to burnout, small changes can make a big difference. Your candle might feel like it's burning out, but it can be relit. Use these tips to help you recharge.



◆ **Take short breaks all day** You may think you need a long vacation to recover from burnout. Not so. Small, consistent resets throughout the day can make a huge difference, Rattu says. Even 60 to 90 seconds of slow breathing, stepping outside or pausing between tasks can help your body come out of stress mode.

◆ **Watch for warning signs** Burnout doesn't happen overnight. Early signs can include irritability, brain fog, low motivation or feeling flat. If you notice signs, take action.

"Responding early is much more effective than waiting until exhaustion sets in," Rattu says.

### ◆ Lighten your load

Burnout is often caused by the "invisible" demands that build up over time — things like decision fatigue, household responsibilities, family obligations or saying "yes" to too many things. Try to identify one area where you can reduce that load, even slightly. That might mean asking for help, simplifying a routine or letting something go.

◆ **Settle yourself** When you feel overwhelmed, your brain has a harder time thinking clearly. Taking a few moments to regulate your body can help you feel better. Simple actions like deep breathing, stretching or walking can help you reset.

◆ **Build recovery into your routine** You shouldn't be "on" all the time. "The body is designed to move between effort and recovery," Rattu says. "Burnout happens when we override that rhythm for too long. Building in even brief recovery cycles is key to long-term resilience."



All images courtesy iStockphoto: Woman, SDI Productions; two people talking, MTStock Studio; people hugging, Peopleimages; drawings, Kadirkaba