

Restoring Healthy Habits When You're Burned Out

1st January 2021

It is hard to stay focused, motivated, or encouraged to look after yourself when you are feeling burnt out. Healthy habits that you have worked hard building up might start to slip, and exhaustion leaves you unable to complete household chores. Other examples you may relate to are:

- Healthy eating goes out the window e.g., over/under-eating.
- Alcohol or drug use increases.
- You stay up late watching TV or gaming.
- You withdraw from family and friendships.
- You procrastinate keeping the home clean or completing chores.
- Hobbies and interests have stopped.
- You are not exercising.
- Feelings and emotions are neglected.
- You feel apathy towards work and life.
- Your attitude is negative and critical of yourself and others.
- Mindfulness no longer exists in your life.
- You stay isolated inside whenever you can.

Quick fixes and instant gratification may feel good in the moment, but paradoxically they will make burnout worse long-term. Whatever stage of burnout you are experiencing, you still need to take care of yourself; self-care will actually increase your resilience, making you stronger and able to get through this difficult patch, speeding up the process of getting back to normal. Don't expect to be able to jump straight back into a full-on self-care routine. Start small to build up these habits:

Your healthy eating has gone out the window:

- Choose one meal to tackle first, e.g. begin having a healthy breakfast for one month and reassess from there.

Alcohol or drug use increases:

- Start by monitoring how much you are drinking/using. Try this for a week, and see what

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your results are. Once you have the facts you will be in a better position to move forward. Note: It can be harmful to stop drinking suddenly if you are dependent on alcohol. Make sure you speak to your GP before stopping suddenly.

You stay up late watching TV or gaming:

- It can be so easy to fall into a cycle of sitting in front of the TV until early hours, waking up exhausted, and then doing it all over again. Start by cutting back one hour of screen time (e.g., going to bed at 11 instead of midnight) over a period of weeks until you have gotten to a bedtime that fits you.

You withdraw from family and friendships:

- Keeping up with loved ones can be challenging when you feel you have no energy for yourself, but they are also a source of support. Be open and honest with feeling burned out and let them know you need time, space, or more support.

You procrastinate keeping the home clean or completing chores:

- Housework is probably the last thing on your mind if you are burned out. If it is getting out of hand, tackle one room at a time, or even one task—for example, leaving everything else but just doing the washing up. See how you feel after a week.

Your hobbies and interests have stopped:

- Maintaining hobbies will actually help with burnout, as it is a release, and a chance to give your brain a break. To ease yourself back into a hobby, choose a couple of hours a week that you will spend doing that activity.

You are not exercising:

- Exercise will increase your self-esteem and ease the symptoms related to burnout such as lethargy and exhaustion. Pick three days in the week where you can go for a brisk

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walk to get you back into a routine.

Your feelings and emotions are neglected:

- Take two minutes when you wake up to recognize what you feel. You can write down a couple of feeling words if it will help. This will encourage you to monitor feelings of burnout, and see an improvement in your mood as you begin to take care of yourself again.

You feel apathy toward work and life:

- Remind yourself what you usually enjoy when you are not feeling burned out. Tell yourself that this feeling will pass, and focus on the things that do inspire you.

Your attitude is negative and critical of yourself and others:

- Replace each negative thought with a kinder one and give yourself a break for being burnt out. Being critical of yourself is unproductive and won't help you improve your situation.

Mindfulness no longer exists in your life:

- If you had a mindfulness or meditation practice, it may have slipped if you are overwhelmed or burnt out. To get back into the habit, download a useful app, or spend just five minutes when you wake up deep breathing and concentrating on your breath.

You stay hidden inside whenever you can

- Outside can feel overwhelming if your insides are too! Hiding from the world won't help burnout. Go out and get some fresh air, or go and connect to nature, beauty, or something that is naturally awe-inspiring.

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Staying connected when burnt out

You may find that you are burnt out from too much work, and not enough free time. When you do have free time, you might want to avoid seeing friends or family because you are too exhausted to do so. However, if you do connect to those who you love, it will probably be digitally, especially during the global pandemic where face-to-face contact has been restricted.

Digital burnout happens when you spend an excessive amount of time on your devices—mobile phones, work laptops, and television. It can be tempting to message a friend who you have not seen in a long while or schedule time for a zoom call rather than meet in person. This may worsen your burnout as you are increasing the time spent digitally.

Here are ways to stay connected while managing burnout:

- Pick one day of the week or weekend when you are offline.
- Spend one day of the week physically seeing a friend, even if it is 2 metres apart.
- Go for a socially-distanced walk with a colleague or friend.
- Spend time catching up in your family's back garden.
- Agree to meet friends at a local park.
- Arrange an activity when meeting friends.
- Depending on local restrictions, invite a friend for dinner rather than a Zoom call.
- Go see a friend instead of texting.
- Keep it simple; a brief visit for tea rather than an elaborate dinner provides ample opportunity to connect but with less effort.

Self-care is the solution to many challenges in life, including burnout. Life can only get better when you care and look after yourself.

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