

Career burnout is a syndrome marked by prolonged responses to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress experienced on the job. The common characteristics are: exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy at work and in one's personal life. Burnout is most common in the helping professions, amongst doctors, teachers and social workers. However, it is not exclusive to the helping professions.

Burnout has a significant impact for not only individual workers, but for the organizations for whom they work. Even the larger economy suffers from the poor performance of those in the throes of career burnout.

Experiencing career burnout often carries a stigma with it and very often workers carry a fair amount of shame about their situations suffering in silence. Getting help is important and the first step in dealing with the problems associated with career burnout is recognizing the problem.

Recognizing the differences between day-to-day normal stress and the disabling effects of career burnout can empower you to find solutions. There are some common warning signs of career burnout to look out for:

Feeling depressed all the time

Warning signs: experiencing long stretches of feeling despair and sadness lasting weeks, months or even longer. Be prepared to ask yourself and answer honestly questions about your happiness in your current workplace and career. Work may be causing you to feel depressed and if it is there it is likely you are experiencing burnout.

Lacking energy

Warning signs: dreading getting out of bed and going to work. Getting to work and feeling constantly tired. Generally, have little energy for work or even for normal daily activities you once enjoyed. Collapsing after work and disengaging with others around you. Where you once enjoyed socializing you now feel like you just couldn't be bothered to make an effort to see other people, even old friends.

Lacking desire to achieve

Warning signs: a loss of desire to achieve career and work goals. If you have given up caring and trying to succeed at work and no longer care about even your personal goals you may be experiencing burnout. In the helping professions this lack of desire may translated to a lack of caring about clients

and patients. Some caring professionals experience what could be best described as compassion fatigue, lacking the desire to understand their clients' and patients' needs, becoming quick to judge and hard pressed to empathize with their clients and patients.

Decreasing productivity

Warning signs: not being able to meet the expectations of your job. You are no longer able to meet the demands of your job and no longer care if you do. You were once productive and dependable, now you miss deadlines and produce sloppy work letting down your coworkers.

Increased absenteeism and being constantly late for work

Warning signs: you no longer care if you make it to work on time, or for that matter go in at all. Mental health days that were once few and far between become a regular occurrence. These days you are looking for any excuse to skip out of work.

Being bored

Warning signs: constantly feeling weary, bored and numb. Finding it impossible to get excited about work. Very often this boredom spills over into your personal life leaving you in a state where you feel like nothing is happening, like you are stuck in a rut.

Feeling anger and resentment in the workplace

Warning signs: lashing out at coworkers and supervisors. Constantly feeling angry and frustrated at work. These feelings left unchecked can create serious health and safety issues not only for the individual, but for the organization. In extreme cases unresolved feeling of anger and resentment can have deadly consequences.

Abusing drugs and alcohol

Warning signs: increased use of alcohol and drugs to help you to “unwind” – developing patterns of substance use to ease or numb the left over stress of the work day. Requiring alcohol or drugs to getting through the work day is clearly a red flag. The consumption of alcohol and drugs dramatically increases.

Experiencing sleeping problems

Warning signs: increased insomnia and sleeplessness. Constantly thinking and worrying about work can cause you to lose sleep. Also, sleep disturbances can be the body’s way of saying it is overworked, or troubled - something’s wrong. Your feelings about work could be keeping you awake at night.

Decreased ability to relax

Warning signs: decreased ability to relax. Feeling like you just can’t unwind, not being able to enjoy your favourite activities, or social situations. Experiencing headaches, dry mouth, increased heart rate and feeling anxious all the time can be warning signs of career burnout. Left unchecked these symptoms can have very serious health consequences even leading to premature death.

If you are experiencing these warning signs of career burnout you need help. The next step is seeking that help. Seeking out the help of your physician and, or a therapist is a good place to start. As well, a skilled career development professional can help you to manage your transition supporting you to find the path to meaningful work, empowering you to make the changes to your life and your career that will lead you toward a greater sense of fulfilment and well being.