



Stress and Burnout

What's the Difference?

What is Stress?

Stress is defined in terms of the interaction between a person and their (work) environment and is:

1. The awareness of not being able to cope with the demands of one's environment, when
2. This realisation is of concern to the person, in that both are associated with negative emotional response.



What are the signs?

Individual

Type	Some Examples
Physiological	Tiredness, shallow breathing, muscle tension
Behavioural	Sleep problems, too many things on the go, changes in standards of appearance
Relationship	Reduced tolerance, grumpy with others, avoidance
Emotional	Marked mood swings, powerful emotions
Spiritual	Loss of connectedness to beliefs and purpose

Organisational

Type	Some Examples
Physiological	Lots of sick leave, tension, unhappy staff, high staff turnover
Behavioural	Accidents, mistakes, systems not working well, people indifferent to the job, too much going on
Relationship	Conflict, role confusion, problem focused, non-committal, disconnection with leadership
Emotional	Lots of changes and tension, fault finding culture, blaming
Spiritual	Lacks of connection to purpose and group behaviour does not match the stated purpose

What is Burnout?

It can be anything that is causing ongoing stress or pressure – where the physical, mental or emotional demand exceeds the available capacity.

It is common in certain professions, such as healthcare, emergency services and law enforcement. These ‘helping professions’ can be emotionally draining work, particularly in situations where the individual is unable to fully control the outcome of a stressful event.

Specifically prolonged stress or problems at work tend to be the most common reasons.

What are the symptoms?

- Do you feel like you have to drag yourself to work, and having trouble getting started once you get there?
- Do you lack energy and productivity?
- Do you have difficulty concentrating?
- Are you excessively irritated or frustrated with colleagues or clients?
- Do you have a lack of satisfaction from your achievements?
- Are you feeling like a failure?
- Are you overwhelmed or unable to cope with the pressures of the job?
- Do you feel helpless?
- Are you experiencing a drop in confidence or a lack of self-efficacy?

Other things that can contribute:

- Working long hours or having a heavy workload.
- Having high pressure to perform.
- Negative workplace environments.
- Unclear boundaries or expectations.
- Perfectionist tendencies or difficulty managing work/life boundaries.
- Being consistently bored.

The different types of fatigue:

- **Moral Exhaustion** This occurs when we are overwhelmed by so many moral obligations that we just don't have the energy to do every single thing right.
- **Compassion Fatigue** This occurs when psychologists or others take on the suffering of patients who have experienced extreme stress or trauma and often suffer stress or trauma themselves.
- **Decision Making Fatigue or Moral Fatigue** Michael Baur explained, “In the pandemic, previously routine decisions (Simple decisions such as going out to eat or visiting relatives.) suddenly had potentially significant health consequences for others and, therefore, became freighted with moral considerations that had not previously existed.
- **Self-control Exhaustion (or Self-control Depletion)** The underlying idea here is that it takes self-control to resist temptations we face to unethically advantage ourselves. We may have opportunities to



sleep with attractive people who are not our spouses, or to take credit for accomplishments at work that are not our own or to cheat on an examination in school. If we have depleted our self-control by working very hard, training for a marathon, following a very strict diet or resisting other temptations to act unethically, we may not have enough self-control left to resist new moral temptations. The evidence for the existence of Self-control Exhaustion in the psychology literature is mixed, but it is supported by significant evidence that people are more likely to screw up if they are tired or hungry or stressed.

What is the difference between stress and burnout?

While chronic stress is typically indicated by an overactive nervous system (ie., trouble switching off, a busy mind, elevated heart rate or feeling anxious), burnout sits at the opposite end of the spectrum. (ie., disengagement, detachment, feeling beyond caring)

- Stress is... "If I could just get XYZ done, then I would be able to relax."
- Burnout is... "I've got nothing left to give anymore."

How to recover?


The answers lie in the old advice:

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat food that nourishes you.
- Move your body enough and avoiding long periods of sitting.



Take time to recharge the batteries. Do what you find most restorative.

- Maintain a work /life balance.
- Connect with others who make you laugh.
- Do work that matters to you.
- Take time to recharge the batteries. Do what you find most restorative such as coffee with a friend, time in nature, art, music, journaling or a hot bath.

Recognising the difference helps you to take stock and to work out the best course of action. 



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