# Burnout: recognising symptoms and effective ways to manage stress



Burnout, defined as a state of extreme mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion triggered by prolonged stress, has become a widespread phenomenon. According to Mental Health UK, an overwhelming 91 per cent of UK adults have experienced high or extreme levels of stress within the past year, highlighting the scale of the issue.

Dr Hannah Kearney, a psychiatrist and UK medical director at Flow Neuroscience, explains that burnout is not a formal medical diagnosis but can be recognised by feelings of being highly stressed and overwhelmed to the extent of complete energy depletion. She describes the experience as “hitting the wall” with symptoms including exhaustion, emotional detachment, demotivation, and an inability to function. Dr Kearney also notes that neurodivergent individuals may be particularly vulnerable due to the prolonged stress related to compensating for executive function challenges.

The prevalence of burnout often intensifies during busy periods of the year, especially winter, when reduced sunlight and hormonal shifts naturally suggest a period for rest. However, modern lifestyles can intensify pressure instead. Wellness expert Penny Weston outlines common burnout symptoms, including increased tiredness, irritability, mood swings, lack of enthusiasm, decreased productivity, and emotional detachment. Feelings of guilt around socialising and taking time off are also associated with burnout, with a study by Expedia revealing that half of respondents in the UK feel compelled to apologise for taking annual leave.

Physical symptoms can accompany burnout, impacting immunity, energy, skin health, and digestion. Common complaints include stomach aches, breakouts, and increased susceptibility to colds. Experts advise paying attention to lifestyle factors like diet, hydration, and sleep to mitigate these effects.

Nutrition plays a pivotal role in managing burnout. Cara Shaw, a nutritionist at Blueiron, emphasises the importance of nutrient-dense foods to support energy and stress resilience. She advises against undereating, irregular eating patterns, and high sugar consumption, which can disrupt sleep and elevate stress hormones such as cortisol. Shaw highlights the risks of extended fasting or time-restricted eating for those prone to burnout, as these can destabilise blood sugar levels and increase fatigue. Restorative foods suggested include complex carbohydrates like root vegetables and oats, healthy fats such as avocados and oily fish, lean protein sources, and vitamin C- and zinc-rich foods. Herbal teas with calming properties also contribute to stress reduction.

Physical activity is recommended as a means to combat burnout, though it should be approached without pressure or unrealistic goals. Personal trainer and health coach Edwina Jenner advocates for short, manageable exercise sessions and outdoor walks to maintain fitness and mental wellbeing. She suggests viewing exercise as a form of self-care rather than an obligation, and advises avoiding intense sessions that might exacerbate stress, particularly for individuals experiencing hormonal changes such as perimenopausal women.

Mental fitness is equally important. Weston praises meditation as a centuries-old practice that helps centre attention on the present moment and control racing thoughts. She advises starting with manageable meditation sessions and cultivating gratitude through the daily recognition of small pleasures. Dr Kearney underlines the role of mindfulness in preventing recurrent burnout by encouraging reflection on contributing factors and seeking professional support where underlying issues like depression or perimenopausal symptoms may be involved.

Rest and quality sleep are critical for recovery and maintaining brain function. Psychologist Dr Becky Spelman describes the brain’s need for downtime to reset and process information effectively, noting that breaks contribute to improved cognitive flexibility and mood. She highlights the psychological benefits of holidays and longer breaks, which can elevate serotonin levels and sustain positive mood well beyond the period of rest. Weston suggests environmental adjustments such as reducing screen time before bed and maintaining a cool, dark sleep environment as well as considering sleep aids or light therapy for those facing difficulties. Talking with trusted individuals or professionals about stress and worries is also recommended to alleviate mental burden.

Overall, burnout manifests through a complex interplay of emotional, physical, and cognitive symptoms, influenced by lifestyle, nutritional habits, physical activity, and mental health practices. The information presented reflects insights from multiple experts and studies, providing a comprehensive overview of this increasingly common condition.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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