

Feeling burned out at work? You're not alone.



At the peak of pandemic lockdowns, many employees found themselves working from home. And for many, that meant using the kitchen table as a desk, trying to juggle childcare or online school during work hours, and frantically hitting mute every time the dog barked. For employees who continued in-person work, many faced childcare or other challenges as well – on top of worries they'd contract COVID-19 on the job.

It's all taken a big toll. According to a global study:¹

75%

of people say that they feel more socially isolated.

- **67%** of people report higher stress.
- **57%** are feeling greater anxiety.
- **53%** say that they feel more emotionally exhausted.

Even as vaccination rates have increased and some schools have reopened, many people still have these feelings. And they may be a sign of burnout.

The ICD-11, the International Classification of Diseases book authored by the World Health Organization (WHO), says that burnout results from 'chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'. Signs of burnout include feeling exhausted, feeling distanced from or negative about your job, and being less effective at work.²

Combatting burnout: tips for employees

If you think you're experiencing burnout, there are things you can do to help manage the symptoms and potentially reduce the causes.

Set boundaries. If you're working from home, it can be tough to switch from work to home life at the end of the day. And even if you're back at the office, bringing home a laptop or checking email on your phone can make you feel as if you're working constantly. Be sure to 'switch off mentally' when it's time to stop working. Not doing so has been linked to anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and fatigue.³

Focus on your well-being. Stick to a regular schedule as much as possible,⁴ and make sure that you're getting enough sleep. Eat healthy meals and get plenty of exercise – outdoors, if possible. If you have holiday time available, take it. And if you think you might be misusing alcohol or other drugs, including prescriptions, reach out for help.⁴

Take breaks.⁵ If you're working from home, remembering to take breaks can be tough. But think about those few moments you used to get walking between meetings or heading down the hall to the loo. A quick walk around the block can reset your mind in the same way. Stretching is a great idea, too.

Stay connected. While social distancing is still a smart idea, there are other ways to connect – with friends, family and even co-workers. A third of employees in one study said that their team doesn't maintain any informal contact while working from home – and that lack of connection resulted in a 19% higher likelihood of mental health decline.¹

Be open about your feelings. Tell your co-workers and manager about the stresses you're facing. They might not realise that you're dealing with challenges such as online schooling or not having a quiet space to work. This openness can encourage others to share as well, and knowing that you're not alone can help you all support each other. If you're being treated for a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression, keep up your treatment.⁴ Or, if you think you need new support, reach out to your employee assistance programme.

While the pandemic may be waning as vaccinations increase, work-related stress may last much longer. If you're feeling overwhelmed, reach out for help: to your manager or a professional counsellor.

1. Smith R. How CEOs can support employee mental health in a crisis. *Harvard Business Review*. May 1, 2020. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2020/05/how-ceos-can-support-employee-mental-health-in-a-crisis>. Accessed February 24, 2021.
2. World Health Organization. Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases. May 28, 2019. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>. Accessed February 24, 2021.
3. Nigam JAS, et al. COVID-19 stress among your workers? Healthy work design and well-being solutions are critical. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). June 12, 2020. Available at: <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2020/06/12/covid-19-stress/>. Accessed February 24, 2021.
4. CDC. Employees: How to cope with job stress and build resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. December 23, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html>. Accessed February 24, 2021.
5. CDC. Taking care of your emotional health. Available at: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/selfcare.asp>. Accessed February 24, 2021.

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