

# 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 child care 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:<sup>1</sup>

**75%**

of people say they feel more socially isolated.

- **67%** of people report higher stress.
- **57%** are feeling greater anxiety.
- **53%** say 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 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.<sup>2</sup>

## Combating 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 like 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

**Take breaks.**<sup>5</sup> 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 restroom. 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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 counselor.

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.

This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 if you are in the United States or the local emergency services phone number if you are outside the United States, or go to the nearest accident and emergency department. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and all its components, in particular services to family members below the age of 16, may not be available in all locations and are subject to change without prior notice. Experience and/or educational levels of Employee Assistance Program resources may vary based on contract requirements or country regulatory requirements. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

Optum® is a registered trademark of Optum, Inc. in the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All other brand or product names are trademarks or registered marks or the property of their respective owners. Optum is an equal opportunity employer.