



BURNOUT



What It Is And What You Can Do

“BURNOUT” is a term we hear often. Anyone can suffer from burnout—feeling seriously stressed and unable to cope. But burnout can be avoided when you learn about its causes and symptoms, how to recognize the problem and ways that you can change your environment to reduce stressful situations.

Causes and Symptoms

Burnout is most likely in people who feel overworked and unappreciated. They become disappointed, and sometimes cynical. They may also feel guilty and ashamed.

The symptoms of burnout can include exhaustion, both mental and physical; hopelessness and helplessness; low spirit and self-esteem; and frequent illness. Burnout happens often in helping professions such as nursing, but anyone doing very pressured (or even very boring) work can suffer burnout.

Recognize the Problem

The first step toward coping with burnout is defining the problem. Is the situation itself stressful? Is there something about your situation that you can change? For example, nurses who care for terminally ill patients can be prime candidates for burnout. However, by accepting that the situation *itself* is stressful, they can reduce feelings of guilt and resentment.

Make Changes

Changes in both you and your environment can help prevent burnout. Analyze the situation. You may have more ability to change your environment than you think. Then take positive action if possible. For example, if lack of appreciation on the job is damaging morale, coworkers can make a group effort to compliment one another on their accomplishments. Your environment will also change as you develop communication skills. Sharing your feelings and listening to others is simple, yet very important.

When you ignore your physical and emotional needs during a period of constant or severe distress, burnout may result. It's important to take time to recover and heal from burnout. Otherwise serious emotional and physical damage may result.

Use and develop skills such as risk-taking, reaching out to friends and talking with others in a situation like yours. Ask someone you respect to look at your situation and suggest solutions. Use this chance to make burnout a first step toward greater satisfaction.