

Don't feel the burn

Burnout.

It means different things to different people. But one thing's for sure: you should know the skills to cope with burnout to avoid a mental health crisis.

"Things are really expensive right now. People are looking for jobs. There's a political climate with a lot of changes. It's all created a lot of upset," says Sara Bennett, an OSF HealthCare psychotherapist, commenting on the prevalence of burnout today. "And social media has a big role in how we feel. We see everybody's problems. Or the opposite: Everybody's life is so great and rosy. It leaves us wondering what we're doing wrong."

Causes and symptoms

Bennett says burnout doesn't have a written-in-stone clinical diagnosis like, for example, the flu does. But generally, she describes it as physical, mental or emotional exhaustion that makes it difficult to navigate life. Issues with your job, school, finances, health and relationships can all lead to burnout.

"You're probably going to feel a lack of concern. We call that apathy. You might not care if something's going on. You might have a lack of interest in things you usually enjoy," Bennett explains. "You might not be sleeping well. You might get stomachaches or headaches. You may be irritable."

A sense of hopelessness can also occur. You might feel like things will never get better, or you can never get ahead of your problems, Bennett says.

Treatment

From your home to the doctor's office, there are ways to navigate burnout.

- First, Bennett says you should take stock of the situation you're in. Is it one that will resolve itself soon? Or do you need a bigger plan? For example, Bennett says accountants can be stressed during tax season. But after all the filings are done and the chaos dies down, their mental health will likely get a boost.
- Take care of the basics. Get good sleep. Eat a healthy diet. Exercise regularly.
- Ask someone for help. For example, if caring for an elderly family member causes stress, ask a neighbor to man the house for an hour so you can get some fresh air or take a nap.
- Learn to say no. You can't be all things to all people. So, recognize when you don't have the bandwidth to take on a task.

"Learn to prioritize," Bennett suggests. "Figure out the things you can't say no to. The things that are really important. Or maybe there's some suffering involved, and you're the person that can help."

- See a health care provider.

"Doctors can prescribe something that might help you through a short-term experience," Bennett says.

“Therapists can engage you unlike others in your life. They can process stressors with you. They can give you good coping skills and relaxation techniques.”

For example, Bennett says she may work with someone to identify what they can and can’t control in their life and encourage them not to get hung up on the latter. Journaling can also help avoid bottled up emotions. And, Bennett implores people to be grateful for the good things in life.

Learn more

Read more about healthy thoughts and behaviors on the [OSF HealthCare website](#). If your burnout has reached a crisis where you are thinking about harming yourself or others, talk to a trusted adult or mental health professional or go the emergency department right away. The [9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) is also available.