

Ways to battle burnout

Workplace burnout was a growing problem in many professions well before the pandemic.

In 2019, the World Health Organization brought some attention to the issue by defining burnout as a syndrome associated with chronic stress at work that goes unmanaged. It is characterized by three aspects:

- Energy depletion or exhaustion.
- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job (detachment).
- Decreased job performance or efficacy.

The most well-studied symptoms of burnout occur with you, the individual. These are proven, time and again, as clear signs that you're in a state of active workplace burnout.

1. You feel emotionally exhausted:

This usually looks like chronic fatigue, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, emotionally dysregulated, anxiety, depression, loss of appetite, physical illness, depleted energy.

2. You feel cynical and isolated:

This is one of the lesser known but serious side effects of individual burnout. This can feel like the loss of enjoyment, pessimism, anger, isolation, detachment from personal or work relationships.



3. You are less effective at work: The standard of your productivity and performance is taking a hit, and you may not even have the emotional capacity to care. This can feel like apathy or hopelessness, loss of productivity, and poor performance.

If any of these stages of burnout sound familiar to you, it's not too late to turn things around.

Whether you recognize all these burnout symptoms and stages or just a few, there are still things in your control that you can do to change for the better. Psychcentral offers these tips:

1. Rediscover your values:

It's easy to put work at the centre of identity and self-worth. That's why

returning to your personal core values is critical. By figuring out your values, you can create better boundaries and build your version of work-life balance by zeroing in on what's most important to you.

2. Talk to your supervisor:

If you're feeling burned out at work, you could start at the source. Rather than fearing or avoiding your supervisor, see them as an important person in helping to bring about positive change. Approach your supervisor with that mindset and enlist their help in making your work more desirable.

3. Try learning a new skill:

While it could seem like learning something new is just another thing to add to your list, it could help alleviate your burnout. Better yet, reclaim a past hobby that you've long felt you don't have time for such as painting or singing — and try to make it a priority. Local community college classes can also be an affordable way to spark your intellectual creativity.

If your feelings of apathy, depression and isolation continue to get the better of you, ask for help from a trusted medical professional.

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Do your research before trying meditation

Meditation is an approach to training the mind, like the way that fitness is an approach to training the body. But many meditation techniques exist — so how do you learn how to meditate?

The first thing to get about meditation is that it's always better to ask for some professional advice before you start. Just like going to the gym, it's always better to get information on how equipment works before you start to use it.

A good place to start is online. Look for reputable sites or videos on YouTube, that help you by talking through meditation sessions, because for a beginner to sit and think of nothing or to have an “empty mind” can be difficult, or almost impossible.

The easiest way to begin meditating according to gaiam.com is by focusing on the breath. An example of one of the most common approaches to meditation is concentration.

Concentration meditation involves focusing on a single point. This could

entail following the breath, repeating a single word or mantra, staring at a candle flame, listening to a repetitive gong, or counting beads on a mala. Since focusing the mind is challenging, you might meditate for only a few minutes and then work up to longer durations.

In this form of meditation, you simply refocus your awareness on the chosen object of attention each time you notice your mind wandering. Rather than pursuing random thoughts, you simply let them go. Through this process, your ability to concentrate improves.

Other meditation practices such as one followed by Buddhist monks focuses directly on the cultivation of compassion. This involves envisioning negative events and recasting them in a positive light by transforming them through compassion. There are also moving meditation techniques, such as tai chi, qigong, and walking meditation. Mindfulness meditation is also gaining in popularity.

Give meditation a fighting chance by doing your research first.

Manage your sugar cravings

Sugar is almost everywhere — added to countless products advertised on every form of media, and included in nearly every holiday and casual meal. And while cravings on their own are not necessarily harmful to your health, it's how you respond to cravings that could become problematic.

Here are some options from Healthline.com for managing sugar cravings:

Give in!

Eating the odd square of chocolate or piece of cake on your birthday is probably not going to damage your health. And it can be good for your mental health to savour something delicious now and then. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, the occasional sweet indulgence is fine — just not every day.

Glance at the label

Sometimes a reality check can curb your craving. If you're craving something that has a packaging label, look closely at the nutritional content, so you can make an informed choice about what to eat.

Take a quick walk

A brief 15-minute walk could cut the cravings. As a bonus, the walk could pep you up more than a sugary snack.

Opt for a nap instead

If you're one of the millions of folks who are chronically sleep deprived in this age of overstimulation, a power nap may do more to revive your energy levels than something sugary.

Swap it out

If you want a hint of sweetness consider healthier alternatives like fresh fruit, trail mix or dark chocolate.



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How to deal with highly insecure people

Whether in a work setting, at school, or at home, insecure people can be challenging to deal with. Their insecurities can lead to behaviours that create tension or conflict in relationships. It's important to be patient, compassionate, and understanding when interacting with someone who is struggling with insecurity. However, it's also important to set healthy boundaries and take care of your own well-being.

Here are a few ideas to help you:

1. Avoid triggering their insecurities

Try to put yourself in the person's shoes and avoid discussing topics or engaging in behaviours that trigger their insecurities. For example, if someone is insecure about their appearance, avoid commenting on their looks. Avoid making any jokes that could be interpreted as hurtful or insensitive. Be respectful of the other person's boundaries and avoid pushing them outside of their comfort zone.

2. Set your boundaries

If the other person's behaviour is causing you significant stress or anxiety, it may be necessary to set boundaries. Let them know what you're comfortable with and what you're not. It can be helpful to explain why the boundary is important to you and how it can benefit the other person. This can help them understand that it is not a personal attack and that you are setting the boundary to maintain a healthy relationship.

Consistency is key when setting boundaries with a highly insecure person. Stick to your boundaries and reinforce them as needed while also being open to feedback and adjusting them if necessary.

3. Don't take it personally

It's important to remember that someone's insecurity is not about you. Try not to take their behaviour personally and instead focus on the underlying issue. Separate your emotions from the situation and focus on the facts. Recognize that other people's actions and words are often about them, not you. Sometimes people say or do things that have more to do with their own experiences, emotions, and beliefs than anything you have done.

4. Show empathy

People who are highly insecure often struggle with self-doubt and may feel like no one understands them. Listening to them and showing empathy can help them feel heard and validated. Show that you understand how they feel by acknowledging their emotions. Say things like, "I can see that you're feeling anxious," or "It sounds like you're really worried about this." Be mindful of your tone of voice and body language, and try to remain non-judgmental.

5. Have patience

When you feel yourself becoming frustrated or agitated, take a few deep breaths to calm yourself down. This can help you to think more clearly and react in a more patient manner. Walk away for a few minutes to cool down and regain your composure if needed. Being patient and understanding can help build trust with someone who's insecure by making them feel more comfortable. This could potentially help them open up with you and make them easier to get along with.

Dark chocolate and your gut

Researchers wanted to find out if they could objectively measure the effect that dark chocolate has on your feelings and whether it matters how dark the chocolate is. They designed a high-quality study called a randomized control trial. Study participants who enjoyed 85% dark chocolate every day for three weeks had a significant reduction in feeling negative. This improvement and boost in elevation (less negativity) was not found in those who had the 70% dark chocolate, as their feelings turned out to be the same as the people in the control group who had no daily chocolate.

To figure out if this improvement was from dark chocolate's effects on the friendly microbes that live in our guts, the researchers measured participants' gut microbiome. They found that the microbiome in those who enjoyed the 85% dark chocolate became more diverse over the course of the study. The researchers say, "These results indicate that daily intake of 85% dark chocolate increases the diversity of gut microbial communities."



The findings of this study also indicate that 85% dark chocolate may have a prebiotic effect on the gut microbiome and this may improve moods via the gut-brain axis. Prebiotics feed probiotics.

Probiotics are friendly gut microbes that are found in some supplements or fermented foods (e.g., yogurt, sauerkraut, etc.).

When our friendly gut microbes thrive, they help us feel better mentally & emotionally via the gut-brain axis. This axis includes several connections between our guts and our brains. These gut-brain connections include absorbing nutrients into the body, our nervous and immune systems, and the production of compounds like hormones and neurotransmitters.

Previous studies pointed to anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compounds in dark chocolate that may be able to improve how we feel, protect the brain, and reduce stress hormones. Plus, these compounds can be activated and made more available to humans with help from a healthy gut microbiome.



What are the five love languages?

The Five Love Languages is a theory developed by Dr. Gary Chapman, a relationship counsellor, in his book “The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts.”

The idea behind this theory is that individuals express and receive love in different ways. Understanding your own and your partner's love language can help you communicate your affection more effectively and strengthen your relationship. It can also help you avoid misunderstandings and conflicts that may arise when partners have different love languages. By learning your partner's love language, you can express your affection in a way that is most meaningful to them and feel more loved in return.

The five love languages are:

1. Words of affirmation

If your partner's love language is “words of affirmation,” it means that they feel loved and appreciated through verbal expressions of affection and appreciation. Compliments, kind words, praise, and expressions of gratitude are important for people who have this love language. Sharing thoughts and feelings is critical.

2. Quality time

If your partner's love language is “quality time,” it means that they feel most loved and appreciated when you spend time with them, engaging in activities or simply being present and attentive to their needs. This love language involves giving someone your undivided attention and spending time together without distractions. This could be doing something you both enjoy, having a conversation, or simply being present with each other.

3. Acts of service

This love language involves doing things for your partner that make their life easier or more enjoyable. This could be cooking a meal, doing the dishes, or running errands. If your partner's love language is “acts of service,” it means that they feel most loved and appreciated when you do things for them that show you care. Look for opportunities to do things for your partner without them having to ask. This could mean making them breakfast in bed, doing the laundry, or filling up their car with gas.

4. Physical touch

If your partner's love language is “physical touch,” it means that they feel most loved and appreciated when they receive physical affection from you. Make a conscious effort to touch your partner frequently throughout the day. This can be a hug or cuddle, a kiss, or holding hands. Ask your partner what kinds of touch they enjoy the most, and make an effort to incorporate those into your interactions.

5. Receiving gifts

This love language involves giving and receiving gifts as a way of expressing love. The focus is on the thought and effort behind the gift rather than the gift itself. Consider your partner's personality, interests, and needs when selecting a gift. Gift-giving doesn't have to be reserved for special occasions only. Surprise your partner with small tokens of appreciation or thoughtful gestures throughout the year to show them how much you care.

Don't forget the meaning behind the gift -- when you give a gift, make sure to explain why you chose it and what it means to you. This can help your partner feel even more appreciated and loved.

Sauna blanket benefits and precautions

If you are looking for a gentle and enjoyable method to reduce discomfort, unwind, de-stress, and potentially lose weight, a sauna blanket may be just what you need. While scientific research to support these claims is scarce, the relaxing warmth of a cozy blanket is a common way to boost emotional wellness.

Sauna blankets are becoming commonplace in wellness centres and private homes. They provide an easy way to enjoy some of the benefits of a regular sauna without leaving your front door. So, whether you want a quick relaxation solution or to reduce aches and pains, consider buying one to suit your budget and needs.

However, there are a few safety precautions to note if you buy a sauna blanket. For example, you should not use one if you are pregnant, and you should never use a sauna blanket if you have a fever.

If you're dehydrated, it's best to give a sauna blanket session a miss. Sweating under a blanket will only cause more water loss, something you need to avoid. Lastly, don't snuggle in your sauna blanket if you've taken drugs or alcohol. They can hamper blood vessel expansion, which means your blood vessels might not cope with the extra blood flow created by added heat.

Here are some things that sauna blankets might help you with:

Improved circulation and pain relief

Heat therapy is an effective method to enhance blood flow by widening the blood vessels. If you often experience cold hands and feet, using an infrared sauna blanket could be a beneficial solution. Also, a sauna blanket can help with aches and pains, especially in the joints.

Reduced stress and anxiety

Many people benefit from cozying up under a heat source, depending on the temperature in their environment, of course. If you're tired after a long day, suffering from emotional exhaustion, and want to reduce anxiety, or simply want to boost feel-good hormones by warming up when it's cold, a sauna blanket can assist you.



How to support mood and mental wellness with food and nutrition

(NC) According to Statistics Canada, 46 percent of Canadians say their perceived stress level is somewhat or much worse than before the pandemic.

Food and nutrition can impact multiple processes that influence our mood and behaviour. These also affect our brain processes, including higher-level cognition, such as social decision-making. This means that you may be able to support better mood and mental wellness by being selective with what you choose to eat. Below are three things you can do to help reduce anxiety and better manage your mood.

It's important to note that unchecked anxiety can seriously affect your day-to-day life. Be sure to take the care and time to give yourself what you need to feel more balanced, and seek professional help if you need to.

Balance mood and anxiety with help from magnesium

The mineral magnesium is responsible for over 300 biochemical functions in the body. Most notably, it plays a role

in helping us calm the nervous system and find a night of better sleep. It's also involved in the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps control sleep and wake cycles.

Help from healthy fats

Getting enough healthy fats does so many wonders for the body and mind. Foods like avocados, walnuts, ground flax, organic eggs and wild fish are thought to support mood regulation, blood sugar regulation, sleep and energy levels. These foods may help keep our cognitive and emotional health in check since they can affect our hormonal system.

Get enough zinc

The hippocampus, an area of the brain, controls learning and mood and contains some of the highest zinc concentrations in the body. One study on 100 female high school students found that zinc deficiency may negatively affect mood. The best food sources of zinc include oysters, red meat and poultry. Pumpkin seeds, legumes and other plant-based foods also offer high amounts of zinc.

Tips for picking the best (and freshest) produce

(NC) A diet that is rich in high-quality, fresh vegetables and fruits can be great for your overall health, but finding the tastiest, ripest, and best produce isn't always easy.

From apples to zucchini and everything in between, here are four tips on how to pick the best fruits and vegetables.

Shop locally

Certain types of fresh produce begin to lose their nutrients just 24 hours after they are picked, but local food does not have to travel as far as food imported from other regions or countries. Shopping locally is also great for the environment as it helps reduce your carbon footprint. Choosing local food also supports nearby farmers and other producers, which benefits the local economy.

Consider organic

Some studies suggest that some organic produce may contain more vitamins, minerals and micronutrients than conventionally grown fruits and vegetables. Consuming organic produce may also reduce the chemicals you're putting into your body because it contains fewer pesticides.

Pick produce with vibrant colour

Choose fruits and vegetables that are vibrant and show consistent colour. For the freshest options, avoid fruits and vegetables that are dull, pale or show signs of discoloration. Brown or black spots on produce could mean it's starting to go off.

Pick produce that feels firm

High quality, fresh produce is firm to the touch. When shopping for fruits and vegetables, be sure to give them a little squeeze to test their firmness. If produce is soft or feels mushy, it could be a sign that it's well past its prime.



Be the best you can be this Spring



The sun is shining, birds are chirping, and there's a little more bounce in your step – everything is better when spring is here. Shake up your warm weather routine with these tips:

1. Take your gym workout outside.

Change up your usual workout location and get outside for your next sweat session. Biking and rollerblading are two great outdoor options that will keep you active and add some variety to your standard gym schedule.

2 Change up your commute. If the distance allows, try walking or biking to

work over driving. It might even open up some interesting shortcuts you're not able to see in a vehicle, and give you a fresh new perspective on your city. If you take transit, get off a stop or two early and walk the rest of the way.

3. Host a brunch. Gather your friends and host a brunch party that's the perfect balance of savoury and sweet. Include an assortment of fresh juices, scrambled eggs, fruit, granola, or other healthy options.

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Seaweed or sea vegetables are forms of algae that grow in the sea. They're a food source for ocean life and range in colour from red to green to brown to black. It's extremely versatile and can be used in many dishes, including sushi rolls, soups and stews, salads, supplements, and smoothies.

Seaweed is an increasingly popular ingredient in cuisines all over the world. It's the best dietary source of iodine, which helps support your thyroid gland. It also contains other vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin K, B vitamins, zinc, and iron, along with antioxidants that help protect your cells from damage.

What's more, seaweed is highly nutritious, so a little goes a long way. However, too much iodine from seaweed could harm your thyroid function. For optimum health benefits, enjoy this ancient ingredient in regular but small amounts.

Seaweed!



Good mood foods to support the gut-brain axis

If you live with clinical depression, speaking with a therapist or taking medication are two solid options that can help. But what if you are just someone who feels a little blue or down now and then? You do see the glass half full most days, but some days you just feel...bleh.

One way to boost that mood could be with foods that boost your serotonin levels.

Serotonin is a chemical found in the brain, blood, intestines, and connective tissues of the human body. It causes blood vessels to contract, helps transmit information across the nervous system, and has a role in brain function. Serotonin is essential for overall health and wellbeing, and people often associate it with positive mood. But the brain is complex, and further research is needed to find out more about how serotonin works.

Reduced levels of serotonin in the brain may be a cause of memory problems and low mood.

According to the author of "This Is Your Brain on Food," there are a variety of nutrients and plant compounds that can promote our body's ability to produce serotonin and other mood-boosting neurotransmitters in the brain, because we generally can't get serotonin directly from whole-food sources.

For starters, consider eating these seven foods that may boost your serotonin levels and mood:

- Eggs
- Dairy
- Tofu
- Nuts and seeds
- Fermented foods
- Fruits and veggies
- Turkey

Whatever diet you decide to follow, remember that those foods and drinks may have a direct effect on your emotions and mental health.