

BURN OUT

It's months since the Christmas holidays and a long time until the next one – it's a classic time for people to burn out! How can you avoid it?

What is burn out?

- Burn out is a physical and emotional exhaustion caused by chronic stress.

So, is burn out just stress?

- No – but they are closely linked. Burn out is a result when severe stress has gone on for so long that the body has become physically and emotionally exhausted.

Who burn out?

- Anybody can suffer burn out but some people have a higher risk: perfectionist and pessimists have often been identified as being high risk as they put extra effort into their activities.
- People working long hours with many demands are a high risk – this doesn't have to be just in the workplace! It can include single parents who work and have child rearing duties and carers who are on 24 hour call.

What are the signs of burn out?

- There is a lot of overlap in the symptoms of depression, chronic stress and burn out such as:
 - Feeling physically exhausted – even small tasks are draining
 - Losing interest in things you used to enjoy or feeling unable to focus on tasks
 - Experiencing conflict or withdrawing emotionally from friends and family
 - Feeling empty or lacking in emotion – people often say they can't remember the last time they felt happy
 - Other unexplained physical symptoms such as sleep disturbance, digestive problems, headaches and aches and pains.
- The big difference is that in burn out, you just don't feel you can go on – the effort required to do so is too much, both physically and emotionally.

What can you do to prevent or reduce burn out?

- Identifying when the stress is becoming too much is the most important thing – listen to your body! Headaches, unexplained upset stomach, diarrhoea, tiredness are all early indicators.
- Set boundaries – say “no”. Work out what are the most important things for you and say “no” to the other things that are going to cost you time and energy.
- Exercise – it can help to get rid of the stress hormones.
- Learn to relax – meditation, listening to music, reading or taking a bath.
- Socialise with friends and family – smiling, laughing, hugging all release the “feel good” hormone, oxytocin.
- Have a massage or a sauna – it can help to relax those tight muscles.
- Acupuncture can help with relaxation and some symptoms such as headaches.

What about people whose family responsibilities is a factor?

- Ask for help - Carers and single parents can't just stop doing their work so it's necessary that they identify people and organisations who can help with the work load or give them respite.

What About Seeing a Doctor?

- If feel overwhelmed or paralysed by the burn out, a doctor or psychologist may help. Anyone feeling suicidal should seek help urgently.