

## Information on COVID burnout

### COVID burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. Symptoms of impending burnout are constant tiredness, increasing irritability and frustration, decreased ability to focus and concentrate, lack of enthusiasm, negativity and hopelessness. Burnout can also cause long-term changes to your body that make you vulnerable to illnesses like COVID.

Typical causes of burnout are:

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work
- Unclear, unpredictable or overly demanding job expectations
- Working in a chaotic, anxiety-ridden or high-pressure environment
- Taking on too many responsibilities, without enough help from others
- Technostress - dealing with new software, tools, or processes
- Poor boundaries between work and the rest of your life
- Not getting enough downtime
- Lack of social support
- Sleep deprivation

If you look at the above list, it is obvious that the COVID pandemic, lockdown, and the switch to online teaching and remote work have created a perfect environment for all of us to feel exhausted, overwhelmed and potentially burnt out.

Many of the current circumstances and pressures are beyond our individual control, and will probably persist for a good while yet. It is thus crucial that each of us does what we can to manage the impact of the stress, and to build personal resilience.

The strategies for dealing with COVID exhaustion and potential burnout are, in essence, fairly simple:

- We need to ask for help whenever and wherever we can
- We need to push ourselves less and rest more
- We need to be kind to ourselves

What does this look like in practical terms?

1. **Take time off.** Extended leave may be tricky in the present circumstances, but even a day off once a week can help keep overwhelm at bay. Use the time to recharge your batteries.
2. **Prioritise** what really matters. Don't overextend yourself. Learn how to say "no" to unreasonable requests on your time or unrealistic goals. If you find this difficult, remind yourself that you can't possibly do it all, and that saying "no" creates capacity for you to say "yes" to the commitments you do need to make.
3. **Set boundaries** around your access to email, Microsoft Teams, and work-related WhatsApp groups. Our remote working arrangements have tended to make it difficult to separate your work from everything else. Deliberately structure your day so that there is a clear distinction between "work time" and off duty time. Set a specific time each day when you completely disconnect. Put away your laptop, turn off your phone, and stop checking email. Depending on your preferred working rhythm, this may be the hours before 8.30 am and after 5pm, or you may want to create another chunk of the day where you are offline. Take

advantage of remote working by tailoring your online working time to your preferred biorhythms. You should definitely not be “always on”, and it is unsustainable and stressful to be constantly available to work demands.

4. Set aside **relaxation time**. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body’s relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response. Some form of creative practice, or hobby can achieve similar calming effects.
5. Get some **exercise** (even if it’s just walking) and try to get as much **sleep** as possible. You could use a day’s leave to get outdoors and walk, if possible, or to catch up on sleep.

More help:

<https://blog.rescuetime.com/burnout-syndrome-recovery/>