

## Surviving Burnout



*"I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread..." Bilbo Baggins, The Fellowship of the Ring.*

Unfortunately, this feeling is not restricted to the realms of fantasy; it is an all too real burden for many.

Everyone needs stress – it is as essential to our lives as food. The stress response is what gets us out of bed in the morning. Without it, we wouldn't accomplish anything at all. However, like our food intake, it is important to moderate the level of stress we are under.

Just how much stress we need to be healthy varies from person to person. Some of us thrive on the sensation of always being on the go and multitasking, while for others this juggling act would be exhausting. Regardless of how much we think we are capable of, it is important to know what our limits are.

The line of demarcation between work and home life is becoming increasingly blurred. Thanks to technology we are now contactable almost everywhere, able to work on projects wherever

there is an internet connection. Homework is no longer a memory from our school days. It's no wonder that burnout is becoming more prevalent in today's society. More is expected of us, and we expect more of ourselves, than ever before. The treadmill of daily life is getting faster, and many can't seem to find a way to slow down. Burnout sucks the enjoyment out of life. Things you once enjoyed may sometimes seem like torture. Tasks that once gave you a sense of purpose may seem meaningless; their completion leaving you with a feeling of tired relief rather than satisfaction. It would be great if we all came with a mental 'pressure gauge' to tell us when we were reaching our limits. The truth however is that we're not machines, regardless of how much we may wish we could work like them.

Because of this, the onset of burnout can be insidious – like walking into quicksand. In this situation, struggling against it may only worsen your situation. The solution to burnout is not to work harder in the hope you'll be able to pull yourself out of it.

Instead, it's important to be able to relax and assess your priorities. Take the time to look at how much you're juggling at once, and ask yourself what's really important. One of the best ways to resist burnout is to find someone to share your workload – delegating responsibilities to others if possible really helps. You can't keep everyone happy all of the time – this is an unpalatable truth. Learning how and when to say "no" is important, especially when you're feeling the strain of burnout. It's better to be

able to do fewer tasks to the best of your ability, than to do a mediocre job of everything because you're under stress. Emails can pile up and provide a major distraction from your working routine, and it can be tempting to want to read through and reply to each one when it arrives. Just because modern communication technology has the potential to be instant, doesn't mean it has to be. Setting a time in your schedule to read and answer emails, rather than doing so all day, can free you to perform more important tasks.

One overarching thing to be aware of is your quality of sleep. It may sometimes seem like an inconvenience that we need to sleep, rather than just being able to plug ourselves in for an hour to recharge our batteries. A good night's sleep pays dividends the next day, and can make you feel much more confident in your abilities.

Most importantly, don't be ashamed to take some time out for yourself. Spend some time doing something you enjoy, and put work out of your mind for a while. This could mean taking a walk, reading a good book, listening to music or watching a movie; the list goes on. What's important is to remember that you work, to enable yourself to live – not live to work.

Christmas is coming up, and it's a fact that for many this simply offers a chance to overachieve on the home front rather than at work. Many of these tips are equally relevant while at home. Remember that at Christmas time, your presence is a more important gift than your presents.

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