



## STRESS & BURNOUT TIP SHEET

# The 5 Stages of Stress & Burnout and How to Address Them



[Chibs Okereke](#), a stress and burnout coach on Calm, outlines the 5 stages of burnout and provides tips on how to address them effectively.

Workplace challenges are the number one cause of stress. This tip sheet helps you recognize and address signs of stress before it becomes chronic and escalates to burnout. Share this tip sheet with your colleagues, and be sure to use it yourself, too.

# The 5 stages of burnout

It's important to understand the stages of burnout so you can identify your symptoms and take steps at the right time to improve your well-being. Here are the five stages:



## STAGE 1 Honeymoon

You start a new job or project with high energy, creativity, and productivity. Stress may start to creep in, but it feels like good stress and excitement. Start positive coping strategies like mindfulness to support well-being so you'll stay in this stage indefinitely.



## STAGE 2 Onset of Stress

On some days, unpleasant symptoms emerge, like irritability, sleep and focus issues, anxiousness, change in appetite or diet, lower productivity, tiredness, or headaches. Well-being strategies are vital, because it's only going to get harder to address the problem as you start to feel more worn down.



## STAGE 3 Chronic Stress

You're feeling stress on a daily basis, and your nervous system is on high alert in response to perceived danger. Symptoms include missing deadlines, persistent tiredness, physical illness, procrastination, resentment, social withdrawal, anger or aggressive behavior, a cynical attitude, and increased use of alcohol or caffeine.



## STAGE 4 Burnout

Overwhelming exhaustion, a lack of enthusiasm, and increased negativity or cynicism towards your job, along with a decreased ability to perform your job, are hallmarks of burnout. Feelings of emptiness, pessimism, self-doubt, chronic ailments, and a desire to isolate are others. The longer you stay in this stage, the more damage you're doing to your nervous system and the harder it will be to recover.



## STAGE 5 Habitual Burnout

Symptoms of burnout are so ingrained in your life that you'll experience significant mental, physical, and emotional problems, like chronic sadness, depression, and mental and physical fatigue. Recovery typically requires leaving your job and focusing on getting better.

# Tips to address stress and burnout

Now that you understand the 5 stages of burnout, here are some tips on how to address them effectively.

1

## Become aware of how you're feeling

If you're not aware of how you're feeling, you probably won't be taking care of yourself. One day, you might find that you're completely burned out and not know how you got there.

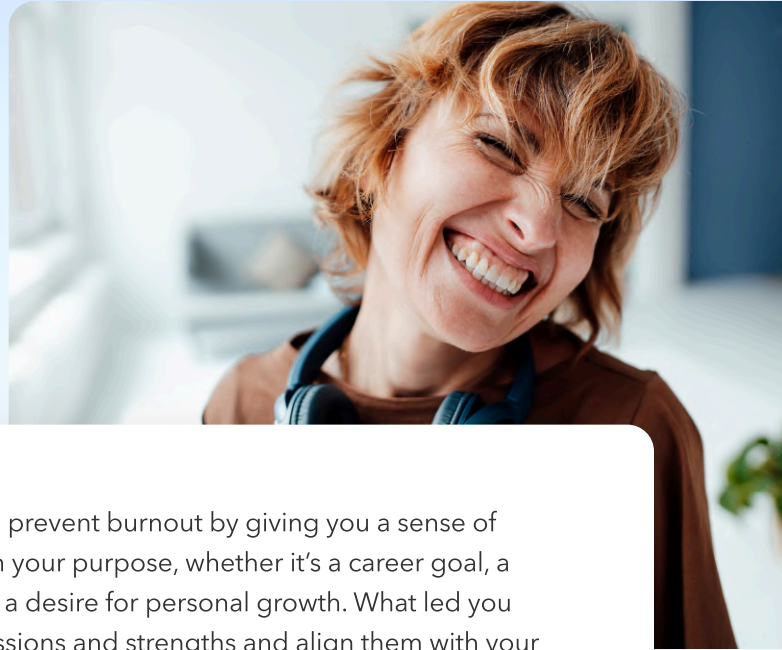
- ☐ **Identify your stress signals.** Everyone has their own stress signals. You might feel cranky, impatient, or ill at ease. You might crave more sugar or caffeine. Maybe you aren't sleeping well or your alcohol consumption is increasing or you're spending hours scrolling on social media. Make a list of your signals.
- ☐ **Reflect.** If you're having trouble identifying your stress signals, reflect back on a stressful experience in your life, big or small. What emotion did you feel? Where in the body did you feel sensations related to your emotions? This will help you become more aware of your stress signals.
- ☐ **Pay attention to your stress signals!** Now that you've identified your stress signals, make a point of paying attention to them when they arise. Think of them as a wake-up call to sharpen your focus on self-care.





## Build your self-care toolbox

Explore practical tools proven to reduce stress and anxiousness in the moment and build resilience. Here are five recommended strategies to incorporate into your toolbox:



- ☐ **Rediscover your purpose.** A clear purpose can help prevent burnout by giving you a sense of meaning and fulfillment. Take the time to refocus on your purpose, whether it's a career goal, a desire to make a positive difference in the world, or a desire for personal growth. What led you to choose your career? Understand your values, passions and strengths and align them with your company's values to get back on track.
- ☐ **Integrate micro breaks into your daily routine.** It only takes a minute or two to make a significant impact on how we feel. A micro break allows us to rapidly de-stress, refocus, and engage. Integrate micro breaks into your day at the start of each meeting, between meetings, and/or as you work on a task. You can find several short micro break meditations, from me and other mindfulness experts.
- ☐ **Practice controlled breathing.** Controlled breathing allows you to get more air into your lungs, increasing oxygen in your bloodstream and lowering your heart rate. Just as soldiers on the battlefield use breathing techniques to remain calm, you can use them to help cope with everyday stressors and get into a restful state. Explore a wide range of breathing exercises in the Calm app. Different types will bring different results, so find what works best for you.
- ☐ **Adopt a daily mindfulness practice.** Research shows that a regular mindfulness practice reduces stress and anxiety, enhances focus and concentration, improves productivity, lowers blood pressure, improves sleep and can even increase pain tolerance. Above all, mindfulness helps us snap out of autopilot and find our bearings in the present moment. To increase your awareness, discover an extensive library of mindful meditations from me and other mindfulness experts in the Calm app.
- ☐ **Lean on a mental health self-care tool** like Calm to reduce feelings of stress, minimize anxiety or a panic attack, and slow racing thoughts as you fall asleep. As the #1 mental health preventive brand, Calm offers a tool to help reduce stress in the moment every day during the early stages of burnout before it develops into more serious conditions.



### 3

## Turn to your healthy behaviors

Round out your self-care toolbox with healthy behaviors that help you feel better. In addition to rediscovering purpose, controlled breathing, and mindful meditations, turn to your healthy behaviors when you feel your stress signals coming on. Here are some examples:



- ☐ Catching up with a friend or family member
- ☐ Getting eight hours of sleep
- ☐ Eating a healthy breakfast
- ☐ Moving your body for 30 minutes
- ☐ Going for a walk outside
- ☐ Reading a book or watching your favorite series



### 4

## Put self-care at the top of your list

Carve out time for self-care. Make your own mental and physical health a top priority and keep these thoughts in mind:

- ☐ Self-care isn't selfish.
- ☐ Change isn't always negative but an opportunity for growth.
- ☐ Resilience is key in today's business environment. No matter the challenges, you have the capabilities to navigate them successfully.
- ☐ You can draw strength from your broader community of friends and family.

## Take our burnout assessment

In addition to heeding your stress signals, determine your burnout risk by taking a short assessment. Answer the questions fairly quickly without worrying about perfect accuracy. The higher your score, the greater your risk of burnout.

Record the number related to your answer in the text field boxes on the left.

1 Not at all   2 Rarely   3 Sometimes   4 Often   5 Very Often

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.            | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I have negative thoughts about my job.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I am in the wrong organization or the wrong profession.                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve. | <input type="checkbox"/> I am frustrated with parts of my job.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers and team.  | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I have no one to talk to.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel that I am achieving less than I should.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I would like to.                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.                |  |

Total Score

### Score Interpretation

**15-18** No sign of burnout.

**19-32** Little sign of burnout, unless some factors are particularly severe.

**33-49** Be careful – you may be at risk of burnout, particularly if several scores are high.

**50-59** You are at severe risk of burnout – do something about this urgently.

**60-75** Warning! Your results indicate you are at extreme risk of burnout – you must seek advice about this immediately.

**Note:** This self-test is an informal method of assessing burnout. While it is a valuable indicator of where you currently are, it is not a scientifically-validated diagnostic technique. You should therefore interpret the results with common sense. Also, it would be best to make allowances for any current events that may have influenced your state of mind when you take the test.

For more support to reduce stress, build resilience, mitigate burnout and achieve mental well-being, redeem your free Calm Premium subscription today.

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