



Rest and reset

You can't pour from an empty cup. Rest isn't just about sleep (although that is definitely part of it). It's about allowing yourself the time and space to recharge. Taking breaks, setting aside moments for relaxation, and knowing when to step back can help prevent burnout and improve overall well-being.

Burnout: Signs, causes, and how to recover

Burnout happens when ongoing stress leaves you exhausted—emotionally, physically, and mentally. It can happen when you're trying to handle too many things—work, school, parenting, caregiving, or other duties. After a while, you may feel drained, disconnected, and overwhelmed.

Key points

Burnout results from prolonged stress and is different from depression. Addressing it early can prevent long-term mental health struggles.

You can combat burnout by taking time off, setting boundaries, prioritizing rest, and seeking support through self-care and professional or peer help.

Simple steps like taking small breaks throughout the day, delegating tasks, and using coping skills to reduce stress can help restore balance and prevent future burnout.

Common signs of burnout

Constant exhaustion, no matter how much you rest

Dreading responsibilities you once enjoyed

Feeling detached, unmotivated, or emotionally numb

Struggling to focus or making more mistakes than usual

Feeling irritable, anxious, or overwhelmed more often than not

Having frequent physical symptoms like headaches, digestive issues, or muscle tension

If you are experiencing several of the signs above, you may be experiencing burnout.

Burnout vs. depression

Many of the signs of burnout are similar to signs of depression, but they aren't quite the same.

Burnout is usually tied to specific roles or responsibilities and can improve with rest or reduced demands.

Depression affects all areas of life and doesn't go away just by taking a break.

If you are unsure whether what you are experiencing is burnout or depression, a free, private, anonymous mental health test can help. Visit mhascreening.org to get started.

Burnout and neurodivergence

Neurodivergence is the idea that not everyone's brain functions the same. The term neurodivergence is most often used to refer to people who have ADHD, autism, or other learning disabilities. It is sometimes also used to refer to people with certain mental health conditions like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). People who are neurodivergent experience burnout for the same reasons as everyone else but are also impacted by additional factors like:

Sensory overload

Social demands/masking

Changes in routine

Not having accommodations met/working in a neurotypical-based workplace

Compared to others, it may take longer for people who are neurodivergent to recover from burnout, and they may need to take additional steps to prevent it from happening again.

What to do about burnout

Acknowledge it

Accept that you're burned out—it's not a sign of weakness to slow down and take care of yourself.

Give yourself credit for what you have been able to do. Everything is an accomplishment—no matter how small.

Set boundaries

Say "no" or "not right now" to things that don't HAVE to be done.

Set small, realistic limits. For instance, if you can't take a full break in the middle of your day, set micro-boundaries (e.g., 15 minutes of quiet time to eat before answering emails).

Set work-life boundaries: Don't check emails or answer calls after hours, and use your PTO.

Reduce screen time and take a break from overwhelming news or social media.

Take breaks and rest (even when it feels impossible!)

If stepping away isn't an option, build in small moments of rest:

Practice deep breathing during activities like washing dishes or taking a shower.

Sit quietly for a minute or two before getting out of the car.

Stretch for 30 seconds before bed or while standing in line.

Find "burnout-proof" recharge moments:

Play calming music while driving or cooking.

Swap "doomscrolling" for a short, uplifting podcast.

Go outside, even if it's just for a few minutes.

Seek support

Ask for help—delegate tasks at work or home when possible.

Talk to a professional—this could be a therapist or someone from your employer's EAP program.

If professional help isn't an option:

Talk to a trusted friend—sometimes just venting helps.

Join online support communities.

If you're a parent or caregiver:

Find another trusted adult (a friend, neighbor, or relative) to give you a short break—even 15 minutes can help.

Let go of guilt—taking care of yourself helps you care for others better.

Seek local support programs (parent groups, caregiver support networks, virtual peer groups).

Prioritize self-care in small ways

Instead of waiting for “free time,” build it into your routine. Try drinking your morning coffee or tea without multitasking—even for one minute.

Let go of one nonessential task (e.g., skip folding laundry, order takeout instead of cooking).

Give yourself grace—not every day needs to be productive.

If self-care feels impossible, start with “bare minimum” care:

Drink some water between tasks.

Stretch when you get out of bed.

Unclench your jaw and relax your shoulders.

Reevaluate and adjust

Identify what’s causing burnout and brainstorm additional changes you can make to lighten your load. If possible, adjust your routine or responsibilities.

Talk to others about taking on tasks to alleviate the pressure you’re feeling. They may also need to adjust their expectations of what you’re able to get done or how long it takes.

Look into respite care options or community support services if caregiving is a contributing factor.

Get Enough Sleep

In the busy world we live in, you might find it hard to prioritize sleep, especially when it feels as if there just aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done. But research shows that good, quality sleep will make you more likely to succeed at your tasks and enjoy greater well-being.

Key points

Sleep is essential: Sleep affects the entire body, including the brain, mood, immune system, and organ health. It also helps remove toxins from the brain and recharge cells.

Stress and poor sleep are connected: Stress makes it harder to sleep, and not getting enough rest can make stress worse. Poor sleep can also lead to serious health problems like heart disease, diabetes, and depression.

Better sleep habits improve rest: Setting a bedtime, limiting caffeine, reducing stress, and avoiding screens before bed can help improve sleep. If sleep problems continue, it may be important to see a doctor or sleep specialist.

Sleep affects the entire body

Sleep plays a role in our moods, ability to learn and make memories, the health of our organs, how well our immune system works, and other bodily functions like appetite, metabolism, and hormone release.

Sleep is important down to the cellular level. Sleep helps the body to re-energize its cells. Waste molecules are also picked up during sleep and transported away, essentially “cleaning” the brain.

Are you getting enough rest?

The amount of sleep you need each night depends on your age. The National Sleep Foundation recommends:

Newborns (0-3 months): 14-17 hours

Infants (4-11 months): 12-15 hours

Toddlers (1-2 years): 11-14 hours

Pre-schoolers (3-5 years): 10-13 hours

School children (6-13 years): 9-11 hours

Teens (14-17 years): 8-10 hours

Adults (18-64 years): 7-9 hours

Older adults (65+ years): 7-8 hours

Experts suggest that adults get seven to nine hours of sleep a night. This may vary if your body needs more sleep when your immune system is working overtime to fight off sickness. To assess whether you are getting enough sleep, ask yourself:

Am I often tired?

Am I using caffeine to get through the day?

Do I get up multiple times throughout the night?

Do I wake up feeling refreshed?

Do I get drowsy while driving or watching TV?

Quality of sleep matters

Nearly 1 in 5 Americans say they lose sleep because of stress. When a person consistently struggles to get enough sleep or good-quality sleep, they have a higher risk for health problems like high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and obesity.

Poor quality of sleep can also increase the risk of developing mental health symptoms like: manic episodes, a first episode of psychosis, anxiety, and depression.

Additionally, sleep problems affect 50% to 80% of people under the care of a psychiatrist, compared with 10% to 18% of adults in the general U.S. population. Among visitors to mhascreening.org who scored moderately to severely depressed, 95% reported trouble falling asleep or sleeping too much at least several days in the past month.

Good quality of sleep means:

Being asleep for at least 85% of the time you are in bed.

Falling asleep in 30 minutes or less.

Waking up no more than once per night for no longer than 20 minutes.

Tips for improving your sleep

To sleep longer—and better—consider these suggestions:

Set a regular bedtime. Your body likes to have a routine, plus you're more likely to get enough sleep if you schedule rest like your other important tasks.

Limit caffeine. Drinking caffeine to stay awake during the day can keep you up at night. Stop drinking coffee, tea, and other caffeinated drinks six to eight hours before bed.

De-stress yourself. Relax by taking a hot bath, meditating, or envisioning a soothing scene while lying in bed. Finish any next-day preparations about an hour before bed so you won't be worried about them as you fall asleep.

Get out in the sun. Getting natural sunlight during the day helps to maintain your body's sleep-wake cycle. Aim for 30 minutes of sun exposure and be sure to wear sunscreen. A light therapy box can help if going outside isn't an option.

Exercise. Working out can improve sleep in lots of ways, including relieving muscle tension. Don't work out right before bed, though, since exercise may make you more alert. If you like, try gentle upper-body stretches to help transition into sleep.

Don't eat right before bed. It can cause indigestion and heartburn, which can mess up sleep.

Nap smart. If you need a nap, take it before 3 p.m. and limit it to an hour.

Say no to nicotine. The nicotine in tobacco products and vapes is a stimulant, which can keep you up at night.

Go easy on the drinks. Drinking too much before bed can make you wake up to go to the bathroom, and drinking alcohol gets in the way of reaching the deep and restful stages of sleep.

Limit distractions. Turn off anything in your bedroom that might distract you from sleep. The light from screens can confuse your body's internal clock.

Make your bed a sleep haven. No paying bills or writing reports in bed. Also, if you can't fall asleep after 15 minutes, you can try some soothing music, but if you remain alert, experts recommend getting up until you feel more tired.

For additional sleep guidelines, see the [National Sleep Foundation's website](#). (But no screens right before bedtime!)

Sleep aids

If you're considering sleep medication, you can buy one of several over-the-counter products, which generally can be used safely for a few days. It is important to talk to your doctor before trying a sleep medication to make sure it will not negatively interact with any other medication you are taking. As for prescription medications, the National Sleep Foundation suggests a limit of four weeks—and simultaneously working on one's sleep habits. Never combine sleep medications with alcohol or other potentially sedating medicines, and be sure to allow at least 8 hours between taking a sleep medication and driving.

If you're wondering about the hormone melatonin, there is [evidence of its usefulness in improving sleep](#) and helping to regulate an irregular sleep cycle. Still, some experts urge caution, arguing that more research is needed to determine proper dosing and timing for taking a melatonin supplement.

If you're having serious sleep problems, see your doctor, especially if you have trouble for more than three nights a week for a month. Your doctor can check whether your sleep issues are caused by some underlying health problem, like depression or a thyroid disorder, and can help with a treatment plan or refer you to a sleep specialist. Also, contact your doctor if you suspect a sleep disorder, like sleep apnea, which involves snoring and gaps in breathing, or restless leg syndrome, which causes sudden urges to move your body, or if you are experiencing any unusual nighttime behaviors. It's also reasonable to see a health care professional if you still feel tired despite getting enough sleep.

If you want help learning to cope better with sleep problems, try to [locate a therapist](#) who offers cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia. This treatment works by changing sleep-related beliefs and behaviors. You might, for example, rethink your notion that the whole night is ruined if you're not asleep by 10. A sleep clinic may also be able to help you locate such a therapist.

Sleeping too much or difficulty sleeping can be early warning signs of a mental health condition. If you're working on improving your sleep but still find yourself struggling, visit mhascreening.org to take an anonymous, free, and private mental health test. It only takes a few minutes, and after you are finished, you will be given information about the next steps you should take based on the results.

I can't sleep!

A good night's sleep is one of the best feelings. And not being able to sleep even when you're tired... well, that's one of the worst. It's not great for your mind or body either: sleep is important for your memory, creativity, immune system, and more. So, what keeps us from getting the sleep we need, and what can we do about it?

Why can't I sleep?

Lots of things can get in the way of a good night's sleep. If this is a new problem for you, it may be that you're stressed out about something that's just happened or is about to happen. This can happen even if you don't consciously know what it is you're worried about—writing in a journal or talking it through with someone else can help you figure things out.

If it's been going on for a while, **you could be experiencing a sleep disorder**. Sometimes sleep disorders happen on their own; other times, they're a side-effect of **another mental illness**. Sleep disorders don't usually go away on their own, so if you think you might have one, it's a good idea to talk to a doctor about it. Getting treatment for a sleep disorder or a mental illness can do wonders for your sleep!

Whether you have a sleep disorder or not, there's a lot you can do on your own to improve your sleep, too.

Sleep hygiene

When you think of "hygiene", you probably think of showering, brushing your teeth... Habits that keep you feeling clean and presentable. Your sleep has a lot to do with your habits, too. **Sleep hygiene** refers to your sleep-related habits: things that either help or harm your sleep. Here are a few sleep hygiene tips to help you get started improving your sleep:

- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, or heavy meals** for a few hours before bed.
- **Keep the lights dim, and electronics to a minimum.** Bright lights tell your body it's daytime. Electronics have a bluish tint that makes it even worse. If you can't avoid using electronics, try installing **blue-light filters** on them.
- **Get some physical activity.** Don't get too hung up on exercising at the "right" time of day. What time you do it is less important than just doing it. [1] Do whatever feels best for you.
- **Use earplugs or white noise** to reduce distractions. You can turn on a fan (point it away from you if you're cold) or listen to recordings of rain or waves.
- **Do something relaxing:** go for a walk, take a shower or bath, or play soft music (on a speaker, or on an instrument if you have one!). Or read a book—an actual physical book, or on an e-reader, *not* on your phone!
- **Only use your bed for sleep** (and sex). Reading a book before bed can be relaxing, but find somewhere else to do it. That way, your brain learns: being in bed = time to sleep. If you've been lying awake for more than 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing, then try again.

I can't stop sleeping

Depression often comes with changes in sleep. For some, this means sleeping way too much. People report that no matter how much they sleep **they still feel exhausted**. It can feel like your body is made of lead and there is something physically pulling you down. No amount of stimulants or coffee seem to help.

It's important to talk to a doctor to make sure this is not a sign of another health condition, even if you have other symptoms or a history of depression.

If you are taking **medication**, talk to your doctor. Some medications can make you really tired. This can be addressed by decreasing a medication, changing the time you take it, adding another medication to address tiredness, or trying a different medication.

Some things people struggling with sleep and depression find helpful are:

- Eating a healthy diet;
- Avoiding or reducing drug and/or alcohol use;
- Talking to a doctor about **medication**;
- **Exercising**, even if it's just starting with a ten minute walk every day;
- Avoiding naps;
- **Sticking to a schedule**; or
- Making plans with other people.

Just like all other mental health issues, steps we take to address oversleeping in depression can take time before we start to notice a difference. If you keep going, **reaching out to others for support**, and doing the small things, big changes eventually come.

BURNOUT: DO YOU NEED A BREAK?

Burnout happens when ongoing stress leaves you exhausted—emotionally, physically, and mentally. It can happen when you're trying to handle too many things like work, school, parenting, caregiving, or other duties.

Do these sound familiar? Check off all that apply.

- Constant exhaustion, no matter how much you rest
- Struggling to focus, difficulty making decisions, or making more mistakes than usual
- Feeling irritable, anxious, or overwhelmed more often than not
- Frequent physical symptoms like headaches, digestive issues, or muscle tension
- Loss of motivation or dread about doing tasks that used to excite you
- Being overwhelmed to the point you feel like you might break down
- Neglecting your health by putting eating habits, hygiene, sleep, or movement on the back burner
- Avoiding friends, family, or things that usually bring you joy because you don't have energy
- Feeling detached or emotionally numb

If you checked off several of the signs above, you may be experiencing burnout.

Many of the signs of burnout are similar to signs of depression, but they aren't quite the same.

If you are unsure whether what you are experiencing is burnout or depression, a free, private, anonymous mental health test can help. Visit mhascreening.org to get started.

**In crisis? 24/7 help is available. Call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org.
You can also reach the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.**

Learn more at mhanational.org/resources/burnout-signs-causes-recover