



Your Story
MATTERS
Audry Van Houweling, PMHNP
Columnist

I'm tired, you're tired, we're all tired: Let's talk burnout

Aren't we all feeling so invigorated lately? Life has been so dang swell, right? It is just so easy these days to rise and shine with a smile, ready to seize the day! Don't forget the glass is half-full so please turn that frown upside down.

OK. Insert sarcasm here. Enough of the toxic positivity. In all honesty, 2020 can kiss my... glass that has not always seemed half full. Yes, there have been meaningful moments and hints of silver linings, but let's be honest, this has been no cakewalk.

Let's talk burnout.

Here is a list of 10 types of burnout that you might relate to:

1. Occupational burnout
2. Caregiver burnout
3. Academic burnout
4. Parental burnout
5. Relationship burnout
6. Political burnout
7. Technology burnout
8. COVID burnout
9. Seasonal burnout
10. Spiritual burnout

Defining burnout is not an exact science and manifests differently for everyone, but in general can be characterized by the following characteristics as

defined by the World Health Organization:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion (fatigue that comes from caring too much for too long).
2. Decreased sense of accomplishment (sense of futility, missing a sense of purpose).
3. Depersonalization (depletion of empathy, caring, compassion).

Daily, I talk to patients with concerns about lack of motivation, difficulty finding meaning, chronic pessimism, mental and physical exhaustion, and a sense of detachment. If there are not productive avenues toward restoration or healing, burnout can evolve into clinical depression or other more serious mental health concerns.

I often give my patients the metaphor of a train track. The train track represents wellness, balance, and contentment. It is where we feel best — emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Life will inevitably jolt us from time to time. We will be knocked off the tracks — sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly. Sometimes the valleys of life will take us so far off the tracks that we need a helping hand guiding us back. Sometimes we aren't so far away. One decision might allow us back, but for various reasons we convince ourselves that we are more comfortable on shaky ground than stability.

I don't think anybody I have spoken to professionally or personally in the past year has been enjoying a drama-free stroll on the tracks. The events of 2020, and not to mention our personal challenges, have inevitably thrown us off a bit — the force of which has been different for each of us. Burnout resilience is not trying to convince yourself that you can stay on the tracks indefinitely, but accepting that you will veer off course from time to time, and

building on the knowledge of the actions and thought processes that aid in you returning once again, however brief your stroll may be.

Sometimes we develop defense mechanisms and rigid thinking that convinces us life away from the tracks feels more powerful, more exciting, more pleasing to others, and may simply be what we are familiar with. Workaholics, people pleasers, and perfectionists may be especially prone to burnout as they will go far off the tracks in order to make the next sale, meet a deadline, appease another, or meet their own lofty standards.

Staying on the track mandates vulnerability and emotional awareness — two concepts often stigmatized in our society. Prevailing popular beliefs still equate certain feelings to weakness and in our go-go-go lifestyles, feelings often seem inconvenient. And so, we become accustomed to repressing, to numbing, to distracting, to running away from emotion. When we don't have the tools to confront emotion, we get stuck in emotion — an exhausting precipitator to burnout. Essentially, we must feel to heal.

Building burnout resilience requires both actions and thought.

In action, there are certain pursuits that can help unlock stuck emotions. Movement, creativity, physical touch, laughter, a good cry, positive social interactions, and simply breathing can all help us move through life's hardships. On a personal level, 2020 has left me craving routine and simplicity. Cultivating routines can help trick our bodies that we are safer even amid hardship. Regardless of splitting my work week in two locations, my Monday-Friday routine leaves little to the imagination.

Audry's workday routine (thanks for caring to read this): Go for a run, share laughs with the barista while also procuring a double shot hemp milk latte, go to work, eat my signature lunch that is more like breakfast (eggs, avocado, bacon), work some more, venture out to another friendly barista to procure another double shot (split shot, mind you), oat milk latte, work some more, maybe sweat it out again, eat some version of dinner, chart, family time, perhaps indulge in what is often an unintelligible hour of Netflix (my latest being "Selling Sunset"), go to bed. Repeat.

Spontaneity may be spared a bit, but 2020 and my work has been everything but routine and so

creating my own version of Groundhog Day seems useful. And yes, I should cut back on caffeine, but that is a sacrifice I am choosing to delay for now.

In thought, we must be able to question our own standards. Are such standards in themselves causing more of a feeling of depletion than restoration? Are we running on fumes because our personal value is based on unrealistic standards of productivity? Perfection is akin to running a race and the finish line keeps on moving. It is exhausting. I don't recommend it. How often are we judging or laying guilt upon our own emotional response? Are we finding the glimpses of gratitude and meaning amid the chaos?

Building burnout resilience is a daily, intentional practice that prioritizes self-care, sets boundaries, and honors the concepts of vulnerability and emotional awareness. If you have felt burnt out, please know that you are in good company, but also please know that the issues facing our world ought to implore us to get a little closer to the tracks by leaning on each other, asking for help, and taking care of ourselves.

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