



BURNOUT VS. STRESS: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE



Why It Matters

Everyone experiences stress — but when it becomes chronic and unmanaged, it can lead to burnout, a serious state of physical and emotional exhaustion that impacts performance, health, and quality of life. Understanding the difference is key to early intervention, support, and prevention.

What Is Stress?

Stress is a normal response to demands or pressures — deadlines, responsibilities, or big life events. In small doses, stress can be motivating.

Signs of Stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or anxious
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Irritability or restlessness
- Increased heart rate

✔ Stress is usually short-term and resolves once the situation is under control.

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged or repeated stress — especially in work or caregiving roles.

Signs of Burnout:

- Feeling drained, detached, or emotionally numb
- Reduced performance and productivity
- Cynicism, negativity, or loss of motivation
- Difficulty getting started or caring about tasks
- Feeling helpless, stuck, or disconnected

⚠ Burnout doesn't go away on its own and often requires time, support, and lifestyle adjustments.

What You Can Do

If You're Stressed:

- Take short breaks throughout the day
- Practice breathing, stretching, or mindfulness
- Reframe your workload or priorities
- Get regular exercise and quality sleep

If You're Burned Out:

- Set clear boundaries — say “no” when needed
- Take extended time off, if possible
- Speak with a supervisor, HR, or a mental health professional
- Reconnect with meaning and purpose outside of work

For more information on stress vs burnout, visit:

[counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/stress-vs-anxiety-vs-burnout-whats-the-difference](https://www.counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/stress-vs-anxiety-vs-burnout-whats-the-difference)



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