

# A Consequence of Modern Day Living - Burnout

By Dr. Helena Lass

**H**ave you ever heard someone say, "I'm exhausted", or "I'm dead tired"? This is often how people unknowingly express the sensation of burnout. It is widely known that burnout is closely linked with stress, but it is much more than simply being tired, and it is often the case that the seriousness of burnout is overlooked.

Let us then ask the questions that need to be asked when talking about the subject of burnout. Is it possible to prevent burnout? How do we know when we have been exposed to either too much - positive or negative stress? How can we change our lifestyles accordingly to make meaningful and sustained change to make ourselves more immune to burnout?

## Stress is perception based

It is primarily our perception or evaluation of something that determines whether or not we become stressed. If we perceive an objective to be too challenging or potentially dangerous in some way, the "flight" type of emotional and mental reactions surface, eventually influencing the body - this is the route of negative stress. If something is challenging enough and we deem the odds of success leading to a potential opportunity in our favour, the "fight" type of emotional and mental reactions occur, and we experience positive stress.

Regardless of the polarity of stress (positive or negative), biochemically your body reacts in the same way. Whenever our subconscious

autopilot system detects a stressor, adrenaline and cortisol are released from our adrenal glands located on top of the kidneys. Our blood pressure raises, our muscles tense, heart rate elevates, and digestion is inhibited, all preparing us to either fight or take flight. We all have experienced this feeling, like a sudden rush. However, being constantly exposed to prolonged episodes of stress impacts the health of our body and reinforces unhealthy patterns mentally as well as emotionally. It can weaken the immune system, cause more regular mood swings, and can manifest as if being 'on the ashes', ultimately resulting in burnout.

However, whether it is a one-time major life event (think of a tsunami), or

the constant day-to-day sub threshold sensation of being 'stressed' (think minor but regular waves), at one point you'll reach your breaking point where the stress reaction gives way to exhaustion, resulting in the sensations of feeling burnt out.

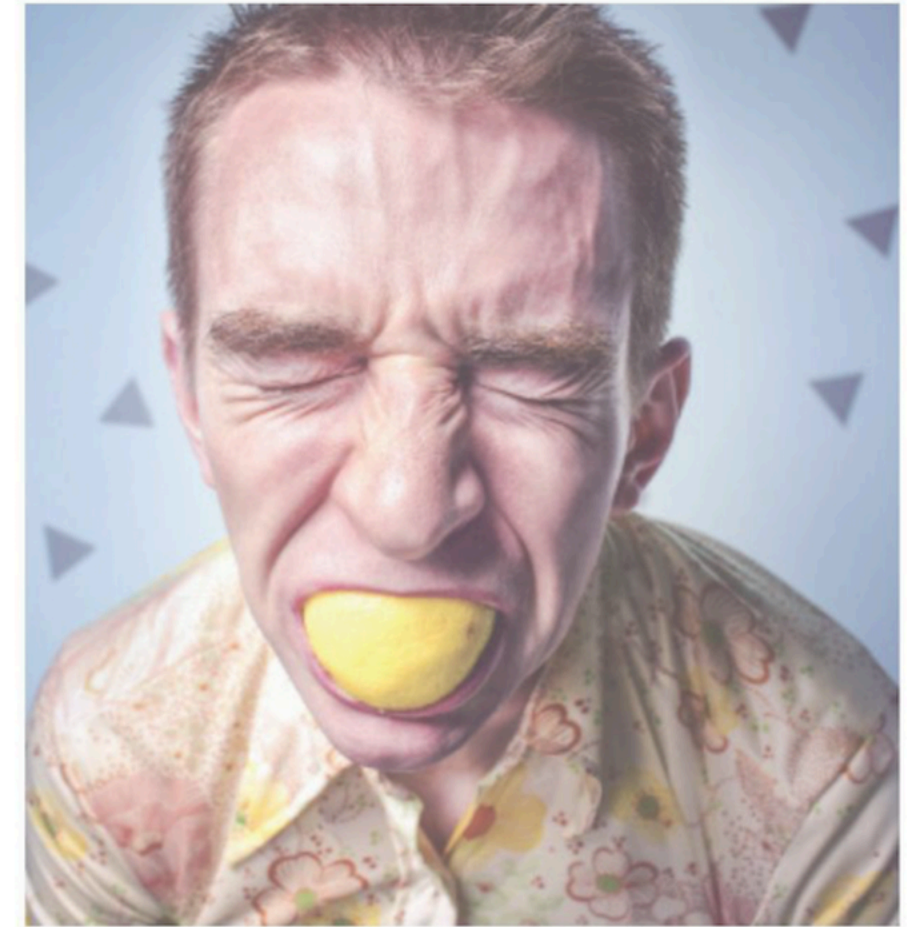
## I can handle everything - Always!

Burnout usually works in either of the two ways, more frequently as a manifestation of chronic stress, or the result of one sudden life-changing event. Because burnout is closely linked with increasing stress, you may already assume that this isn't a result of one single event but is rather a question of lifestyle choices and skills to handle the inner turmoil that gets triggered by certain events.

Burnout can happen to anyone and everyone, however there are certain types of people more prone than others. Those who are success or achievement oriented, so-called "career" people, managers and entrepreneurs tend to be more susceptible. They are the people who seem capable of anything. These sorts of people live for their work, strive for success and never switch off.

They are burdened with numerous to-do lists and they check their work emails on a Sunday. They are always on the go and find it difficult taking time out. They validate themselves based on their achievements and getting things done. Even during their vacation, they feel the need to be on the go, filling their days with planned activities and engagements. The bigger picture is very often completely lost; they just don't seem to be able to stop the lifestyle of 'busyness'.

When you look at that description you may notice that these people seem invincible, they don't seem to complain and seem to be able to manage everything. However, their lives are filled with dangerous amounts of positive stress, or eustress. Of course, this positive stress feels good in the beginning, and is indeed useful because it helps to get things done and achieve goals. However, in positive stress



'mobilizing us for action' means constant release of adrenaline and cortisol from the adrenal glands - the stress hormones.

From the perspective of burnout, it is irrelevant whether the events that lead to the need to mobilize are "positive" or "negative" and if this lifestyle becomes habitual, it can quickly lead to near addiction, because one adrenaline rush primes the craving for another. Negative stress is not a problem because everyone already avoids it due to its association with negative feelings. Most of the cases of burnout today are caused by people "riding the wave" of positive stress because people do not expect it to be dangerous - on the contrary it is almost actively encouraged and often glorified.

## Lifestyle Changes - No Easy Way Out

It is very much the common and accepted prevailing attitude of our modern working world that its perfectly normal to be "stressed". It is

no wonder then that more and more of us are facing burnout.

In order to prevent or recover from burnout, we must adjust our whole lifestyle. Already the term "lifestyle" suggests that this is not just a minor phenomenon that can be simply fixed with a few good night's sleep or a vacation. This is not a bacterial infection that can be cured by taking a few pills and then rushing back to our "normal" life where stress reaction is considered inevitable. It is this attitude that is what really needs changing leading to skills that help in handling reactions.

One must consider both the physical and psychological sides, understanding that psychological arousal leads to stress reaction in the physical body. It's not just about reassessing values, setting priorities or time management. The most crucial elements to address are the chronic emotional and mental reactions.



It is not known to most people that burnout is more accurately known as adrenal burnout - a state whereby the adrenal glands are burnt out due to the high demand to constantly release stress hormones.



What can be done to prevent burnout taking hold? By educating ourselves on how we function internally will help us further understand the problems associated with burnout. This will help you make better and more informed choices for yourself.

Learning relaxation exercises, in particular stress relieving breathing exercises will also help, but in essence it's already alleviating a consequence caused by a reaction. It is important to take time out during our busy days to just sit and simply be. It seems obvious, but many of us feel guilty for investing in sufficient leisure time. Make it a point to put aside a certain time each week to do that thing you have been meaning to do, make good on that promise to meet a friend, do something with your loved ones, or do something entirely for yourself. Just make sure you do it. Making sure we are getting 7-9 hours per night of continuous quality sleep can make all the difference in how

we think and feel.

Finally, try consulting a competent specialist, psychiatrist, psychologist, nutrition therapist, fitness trainer, or a yoga teacher to guide you in all directions – physical, emotional, mental, conscious and the self. Seek a solution that enables you to release automatic emotional reactions. You have found an effective method when the same situations do not trigger the reaction that was previously the problem.

#### CONCLUSION

Burnout should not be underestimated or downplayed as a mere side effect of modern day living. In understanding the physiological effects, we see just how dangerous burnout can be in the long-term. By implementing a lifestyle adjustment will ensure that burnout is prevented, however learning to discontinue emotional reactions that lead to stimulation of the adrenal glands is the key. Learning intra-personal skills and training

awareness will naturally expand your understanding in many other areas of life, helping to transition from dealing with problematic consequences to skillfully creating your own destiny.



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