

BURNOUT

Mental Health Foundation describe burnout as being 'a term used to describe a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, often related to workplace stress.'

Burnout is different from everyday stress because it's directly related to work. While it's not classified as a mental health condition, it is closely linked to mental health and can have a huge impact on mental wellbeing.

Common causes of workplace burnout

There are many different factors that can contribute to someone experiencing burnout. Some examples of these are:

- ❖ Having an excessive workload / unrealistic deadlines
- ❖ Lack of control or autonomy over work
- ❖ Long working hours or poor work-life balance
- ❖ Lack of management support
- ❖ Job insecurity
- ❖ Organisational change

There are recent reports that say it's estimated that around 65% of UK workers experience burnout which is 11% higher than the previous 2 years (Mental Health Foundation). This highlights that burnout is becoming an increasingly more common issue that needs to be addressed in workplaces.

Signs & symptoms of burnout

Burnout generally develops gradually over a period of time but there can be many warning signs. For example:

- ❖ Feeling overwhelmed or trapped at work
- ❖ Chronic fatigue or low energy
- ❖ Increased absence / presenteeism
- ❖ Reduced productivity
- ❖ Withdrawing from colleagues
- ❖ Health issues - headaches, sleep problems, muscle tension, digestive issues, minor illnesses

These signs are common in many different situations and are often mistaken for issues with personal resilience, however they can also be indicators of unsustainable working conditions.



Why should burnout matter to organisations?

Organisations with high levels of burnout in employees can experience huge negative impacts on performance and organisational risk. Deloitte published a report in 2024 that said, 'poor mental health costs UK employers £51 billion a year' and this is mostly because of presenteeism and low productivity.

It's also unsafe for employees to be working in this condition, especially in more safety critical roles. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 it's the legal duty of the employer to protect the physical and mental health of employees. The HSE expect organisations to use risk assessments to identify the stress-related risks, review controls regularly, act early instead of waiting for sickness absence, and to take reasonable steps to reduce workplace stressors.

Preventing burnout at work

Effective burnout management focuses more on systems than it does on individual coping strategies. Some simple approaches you can take to prevent burnout are:

- ❖ Keeping workloads manageable and having realistic expectations
- ❖ Train managers and supervisors to recognise the early warning signs
- ❖ Promote clear working boundaries such as working hours
- ❖ Use your data to identify the pressure points (sickness absence, turnover rates, survey results, occupational health referrals)

Deloitte reported that for every £1 spent on employee mental health and wellbeing, UK employers see an average return of £4.70 from improved productivity and reduced levels of sickness absence.

Support

<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/lifes-challenges/work-related-stress/>

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/burnout/>

<https://www.thecalmzone.net>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>

