

# Burnout

A perfectly cromulent breakdown (Part 1)

# Disclaimer

- I'm not a doctor, not a trained therapist and also not very professional
- I'm going to focus on our industry and being an engineer
- I may touch on some sensitive topics, such as depression and anxiety

# What is burnout?

*Burnout is a form of exhaustion caused by constantly feeling swamped. It's a result of excessive and prolonged emotional, physical, and mental stress. In many cases, burnout is related to one's job. Burnout happens when you're overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to keep up with life's incessant demands*

# How do you know you have it?

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): The three components

# 1. Exhaustion

- Physical, cognitive and emotional fatigue.
- Almost chronic in nature
- Forget Mondays, the thought of going into work is a chore

## 2. Cynicism/Depersonalization

- Moody and irritable around colleagues
- Detached from work
- A real Negative Narwhal

# 3. Inefficacy

- Lacking confidence in work
- Unable to complete tasks

Herbert Freudenberger worked in a free clinic in New York city and was one of the pioneering researchers on burn out. This description from one of his notes nails it on the head



There is a feeling of exhaustion, being unable to shake a lingering cold, suffering from frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, sleeplessness and shortness of breath. The burn-out candidate finds it just too difficult to hold in feelings. He cries too easily, the slightest pressure makes him feel overburdened and he yells and screams. With the ease of anger may come a suspicious attitude, a kind of suspicion and paranoia. The victim begins to feel that just about everyone is out to screw him. He becomes the 'house cynic.' Anything that is suggested is bad rapped or bad mouthed. A sign that is difficult to spot until a closer look is taken is the amount of time a person is now spending in the free clinic. A greater and greater number of physical hours are spent there, but less and less is being accomplished. He just seems to hang around and act as if he has nowhere else to go. Often, sadly, he really does not have anywhere else to go, because in his heavy involvement in the clinic, he has just about lost most of his friends

# Burnout is a recognized syndrome

Burnout was previously in the 10th revision of the ICD. [1]

Its classification has been expanded upon in the 11th revision [2]

# It's more than just feelings

Research from an integrative team of psychological scientists at the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden provides striking evidence that workplace burnout can alter neural circuits, ultimately causing a vicious cycle of neurological dysfunction. [3]

# Physical changes to parts of your brain and body

- Mood regulation
- Affects memory
- Attention lapse
- Lower cortisol levels
- Increased risk of heart disease

Ok, NavMD, I'm convinced I have it  
now

Where to from here?

First my favourite topic

Me

My career has had many ups and downs, I've bowed out of a job as a software engineer twice.

- I lost any motivation for my job
- I hated programming, computers, technology
- I chastised the company and the people I worked with
- I worked nights to make up for unproductive days
- I got little sleep and stopped doing healthy things
- I pushed away all my friends



Why?

# That startup life

- I co-founded a failed startup
- I slept at the office because it was too late to catch the bus home
- I did everything because I felt I had to
- I tried to do more
- Hustle culture
- Overconsumption

# John Henryism

Dealing with an unforgiving social environment as a minority or as someone from a low socio-economic background [4]

- efficacious mental and physical vigor
- a strong commitment to hard work
- a single-minded determination to succeed

# I didn't feel rewarded

*Burnout occurs when the reward for what we do is less than the effort we put into it.*

**Kati Morton**

My work became my life and when my work stopped challenging and rewarding me, my life did the same.

What can help

# 1. Self care

- Exercise
- Meditate
- Go on long walks
- Read a book
- Play a video game

Find the thing that helps you relax and gives your day some satisfaction

## 2. Alternatively, do nothing

Don't think you have to fill your day up with a list of activities.

*“Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering.”*

**Winnie The Pooh**

### 3. Get help from colleagues

- We're not in this alone.
- Learn to rely on others in your team.



## 4. Prioritize your work

- You can't do everything, so pick your battles.
- Set achievable goals for the day, the week

## 5. Reduce the noise

- Slack is your best friend and worst enemy.
  - Don't respond to every message immediately
  - Get it off your phone or mute notifications at certain times
- Ignore the incessant notifications on your phone

## 5.5 It's ok to miss out

- It's ok to not know the latest tech
- You don't need a laundry list of RSS feeds and podcasts to stay on top of trends
- Don't be a magpie

## 6. Learn to say No

- You don't have to please every one
- Redirect the request and lean on your team

# 7. Change up your environment

- Work from somewhere different.
  - You don't need 3 32" monitors all the time.

## 8. Make friends/connections

- Share your story and talk with others about how you're feeling
- Support each other and that can mean being vulnerable

What if I'm already burned out?

Do all the things I mentioned before, but also

- Talk to your Engineering Manager
- Find something that satisfies you outside of work (volunteering, hobbies, etc)
- Take a break
  - I mean really take a break



What can we do

- Reduce the cognitive load at work
  - Code readability/maintainability
  - Documentation
- Encourage participation in decision making
  - We're not machines, it helps provide context
- Lean into async communication
  - All these timezones, lets not sacrifice our hours to stay informed
- Encourage a good work life balance

Give #props



## Final words:

I feel like I'm still figuring this out.

And I invite y'all to figure it out with me.

**DMS are always open if anyone wants to chat about their own experiences with burnout privately.**

# Appendix

- [1] <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- [2] <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/physician-health/who-adds-burnout-icd-11-what-it-means-physicians#:~:text=Burnout%20is%20now%20categorized%20as,the%20official%20compendium%20of%20diseases.>
- [3] <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/burnout-and-the-brain>
- [4] [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/45356/110132005Article\\_BF01379448.pdf?sequence=1](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/45356/110132005Article_BF01379448.pdf?sequence=1)