

# Three Stages of Burnout

1. Stress Arousal
2. Energy Conservation
3. Exhaustion

These stages usually occur sequentially from Stage 1 to Stage 3, although the process can be stopped at any point.

## Stage 1 - Stress Arousal

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Bruxism (grinding teeth at night)
- Insomnia
- Forgetfulness/poor concentration
- Gastro-intestinal disorders
- Headaches

Stress arousal includes physiological and psychological responses. Some of these include persistent irritability, persistent anxiety, periods of high blood pressure, bruxism (the grinding of teeth during sleep), insomnia, and forgetfulness. Additionally, you may have heart palpitations, unusual heart arrhythmia, concentration problems, headaches/stomach problems, and acute gastrointestinal symptoms. With the presence of any two of these, you may be experiencing stage 1 stress arousal.

## Stage 2 - Energy Conservation

- Lateness
- Procrastination/turning work in late
- Excessive time off
- Sexual dysfunction
- Fatigue

Energy conservation attempts to compensate for stress. If those strategies fail, consequences might include excessive lateness; procrastination; excessive time off; sexual dysfunction (desire, performance); persistent tiredness; social withdrawal from friends and family; increased cynicism; resentment; increased substance use (nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, prescription drugs); excessive apathy; and lack or loss of spirituality. Again, any two of these symptoms may signal you're in stage 2 of the burnout cycle.

### **Stage 3 - Exhaustion**

- Chronic sadness/depression
- Suicidal ideations
- Chronic GI problems
- Chronic headaches
- Social isolation

The exhaustion stage is where most people finally get a sense that something may be wrong. The symptoms include: chronic sadness or depression, chronic stomach or bowel problems, chronic mental fatigue, chronic physical fatigue, chronic headaches or migraines, the desire to "drop out" of society... the desire to get away from family, friends, and even recurrent suicidal ideation. Like the previous stages any two of these symptoms can indicate stage 3 burnout. Exhaustion can lead to increased risk of unethical behavior related to safe patient care.

Remember, burnout is a process that usually occurs sequentially, it progresses through stages, thus giving you the opportunity to recognize symptoms and take the necessary steps to prevent it.

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