Stress Management – Burnout Prevention and Treatment

by Jessica Sanchez, Staff Associate II

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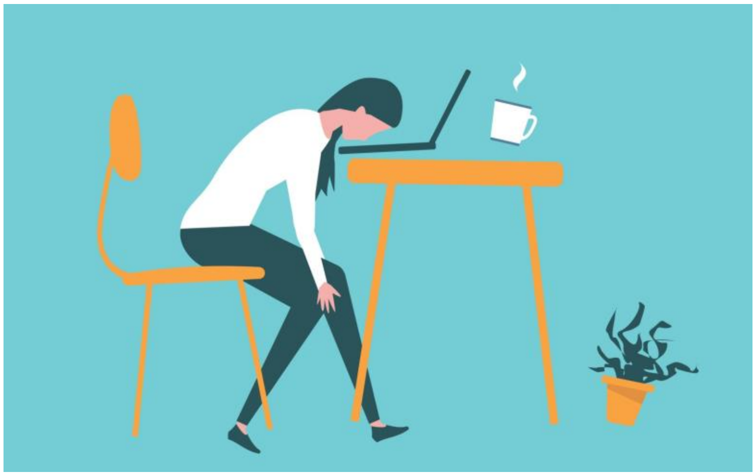

For many of us, there has been a constant feeling of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion as a result of prolonged stress. The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for many people due to fear about the virus and anxiety about the future. This is especially true when it is added to existing pressures as we try to continue living our daily lives. If you are unsure what you are feeling is severe stress or burnout, it's important to identify the signs and implement coping strategies that help reduce stress and promote well-being. Dealing with burnout requires the "Three R" approach:

Recognize

The technique starts out by watching for signs of burnout and being aware of one's own mental state. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. Burnout is a gradual process and may be hard to detect in the early stages. There are many physical signs of burnout including extreme fatigue, changes in appetite or sleep habits, and frequent headaches or muscle pain. In addition to physical signs, there is also the feeling of helplessness or hopelessness and loss of motivation and ideals.

Reverse

Once recognized, we want to undo the damage by seeking support and managing stress. When burnout, problems seem insurmountable, it is difficult to muster up the energy to care, let alone take action to help yourself. However, you have a lot more control over stress than you may think. One of the most effective ways to combat stress is to reach out to others. Social contact is nature’s antidote to stress. Talking face to face with a good listener is one of the fastest ways to calm your nervous system. The person listening does not have to fix your stressors; they just have to listen attentively without becoming distracted or expressing judgement.

Resilience

After giving ourselves time to heal, we want to focus on prevention of future burnout by building resilience through taking care of your physical and emotional health. While the Three R method provides a good framework, it does not thoroughly answer the question of what can one do to lower stress on a daily basis.

Sleep

Not getting enough sleep can severely stress your body and mind. When you are not getting the sleep you need, your body goes into overdrive, over-working your nervous system and making it much harder to relax and get relief.

Exercise

Exercise releases endorphins that when released, help decrease pain sensations and boost feelings of euphoria. Walking is great for your heart and easy to add to a daily routine. Physical activity has meditative qualities. Whether you are in an intense cardio workout or practicing yoga at home, physical activity can help distract your mind from stressors and allow you to focus on what takes priority.

Unplug to Escape

Most of us want to stay up-to-date on all of the developments of COVID-19 as well as other changes in the world. Overexposure to negative news, however, can send our stress levels through the roof. Turn off your phones to schedule media blackout times throughout the day to give yourself a break.

Spend Time with Loved Ones

Sometimes, the best way to relax is to be around people who make you feel at ease. Having a strong support network is shown to help people deal with stress more effectively.

Overall, the best we can do is find a mix of strategies that work well for us, and put them to use. At the end of the day, stress is not something we can avoid. We can, however, do our best to make the most of the situation and prioritize our own mental health to ensure we get as much from our lives as possible.

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