

DEALING WITH BURNOUT

THE KEY DIMENSIONS OF BURNOUT

BURN: The 'burn' component expresses as irritability, frustration, anger, cynicism and perhaps a bitterness towards an unresponsive public.

OUT: The 'out' component refers to feeling drained and exhausted. Our passion and enthusiasm becomes depleted. We feel detached and want to distance, not just from others, but emotionally and cognitively from our work.

INEFFICACY: Burn out is often accompanied by negative self-evaluation. We judge ourselves for feeling burnt-out. Self-doubt, feelings of incompetency and a perceived lack of personal accomplishment can further plague our spirit.

WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is a result of stress accumulated over long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding. It can be caused by a combination of enduring situational stressors, high expectations and feelings of pressure. It is a miserable state of existence and can impact life at home, work and leisure.

It is relevant to talk about burnout in the context of coping with climate change because many people who are concerned about climate change are actively trying to do something about it, either through climate action groups, trying to get their communities, workplaces, schools, local politicians engaged, and it is through this sort of activity that many people might be vulnerable to burning out.





BURNOUT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

There are certain features of working on environmental and climate change problems that can make people particularly vulnerable to burnout:

- ❖ Holding in mind, or being aware, of a large, complex, global problem.
- ❖ Seeing climate problems as overwhelming and urgent.
- ❖ Carrying a burden of knowledge that society as a whole is unable or unwilling to face.
- ❖ Holding prolonged attention on disturbing and negative information and future projections.
- ❖ Having high levels of investment and unrelenting commitment to the issue.
- ❖ Knowing that our fellow human beings', and our own way of life, has both unwitting and intentional negative consequences.
- ❖ A burden of knowing that society as a whole is disconnected and not taking action.

The *context* within which people may be working on climate change can also contribute to stress. Some of the challenges include:

- ❖ Working against resistance (e.g., of the powerful fossil fuel industry).
- ❖ Lacking resources.
- ❖ The slow pace of progress.
- ❖ Working outside the support of an organisation. Many people working on climate change are doing so as individuals or in small under-resourced community groups.
- ❖ Experiencing confrontation with opponents, facing harassment or threats (intimidation, hate mail, etc).

FOR FURTHER HELP

APS Find a psychologist service:

1800 333 497

Lifeline: [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au)

Beyond Blue: [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Contact your GP

PREVENTING BURNOUT

Feelings of burnout can be a warning sign and remind us that we need to listen to our bodies and minds and think carefully about what we are doing and how we are doing it. Then, we might re-evaluate and re-prioritise our activities. It doesn't have to be all burnout, it can also be breakthrough:

<http://plantothrive.net.au/2014/08/burnout-experiences-advice>

There are some factors which can help to increase resilience and prevent burnout. See our tip sheet on coping with climate change for strategies.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF BURNOUT?

Burnout typically happens slowly, over a long period of time. There can be a range of emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physiological signs, like a creeping sense that environmental concerns are taking over your life, and neglecting relationships with friends and loved ones until 'the next hurdle' is overcome.

Some other examples include:

Emotional signs:

- ❖ Temper tantrums over trivial matters.
- ❖ Feeling guilty for resting, doing pleasurable things.
- ❖ Feelings of hopelessness.

Cognitive signs:

- ❖ Difficulty in making decisions or staying focused.
- ❖ A growing tendency to think negatively.
- ❖ A loss of sense of purpose and energy.

Behavioural signs:

- ❖ Imbalance between work, family, play, hobbies.
- ❖ Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning.
- ❖ Becoming accident prone.

Physiological signs:

- ❖ A general sense of running on empty.
- ❖ Muscle tension, headache, backache, tiredness.

