

Stress and Burnout

What is Stress?

Stress is a normal part of our daily lives and each one of us reacts to stress in different ways. Stress produces physical, hormonal and chemical changes in the body to accelerate the functioning of the heart, lungs and muscles. Not all stress is bad for us. We all need a certain degree of stress in our lives to function and to achieve things. Excessive amounts of stress however over a prolonged period of time, results in loss of well being or illness. Excessive stress generally leads to burnout.

What is Burnout?

Burnout is a term which is frequently used to describe the emotional and physical exhaustion experienced by people as a direct result of excessive study or work related stress. Burnout can cause significant physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual damage to people.

What are the Characteristics of Burnout?

- Appearance of anxiety and depression.
- Cynical attitudes
- Suspicious outlook
- Excessive use of alcohol and other drugs
- Appearance of overconfidence
- Feeling physically sick on a regular basis with headaches, colds, stomach problems, etc.

What are the Factors that Contribute to Burnout for Employees?

- **Excessive work load** - Workers feeling that they have excessive amounts of work that they have to manage on a daily basis, without any “down time”. Workers end up feeling “snowed down” and “overwhelmed”. They feel that they are “chasing their tail”.
- **Lack of personal control** - When workers feel that they have very little autonomy to decide what needs to be done in their job. Having limited flexibility to go about performing their work tasks in a preferred way. People often feel “micro managed”.
- **Lack of recognition** - When workers feel that their work contribution is not adequately recognised, valued or acknowledged. Not getting adequate positive or constructive feedback from their supervisors. Sometimes the only time they hear anything from their supervisors is when they have been perceived to have done something wrong.

- **Role Ambiguity** -Employees being unclear of what is expected from them. The expectations in their role keeps changing all the time.
- **Reduced Career Advancement Opportunities** - Employees feeling that they have limited options to advance within the organisation due to limited career opportunities.
- **Poor Leadership** - Employees receiving inadequate or poor leadership from one's supervisors or managers, as there is no cohesive vision of where the department or organisation is going.
- **Conflict** - Conflict with Managers and /or colleagues can cause a significant amount of stress, which can also contribute to burnout.

STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING BURNOUT

There are a number of strategies that can be used in order to mitigate the incidence of burnout.

- Developing very clear boundaries between work and personal life.
- Developing and maintaining warm, nurturing relationships professionally and personally.
- Making sure that regular breaks are taken during the day eg tea, lunch breaks etc.
- Being honest with yourself and your management team about how much is possible to achieve during a working day.
- Becoming aware of potential dangers to your physical and mental health and putting some mechanisms in place to alleviate the pressure. It is even better to put structures in place to prevent this incident occurring from an Occupational Health and Safety perspective.
- Obtain appropriate peer / family support formally and informally.
- Eating properly, getting adequate amounts of sleep, exercising regularly.
- Keeping in touch with friends in own environment.
- Having time out to participate in external workshops, seminars, continuing education activities.
- Taking regular annual leave breaks during the year to reenergise.

If none of the above strategies are working, seek appropriate professional support and assistance from the counselling staff to help you deal with your stresses, and to discuss other options available.