

Breaking Free **FROM BURNOUT**

A Guide to Mental & Emotional Reset



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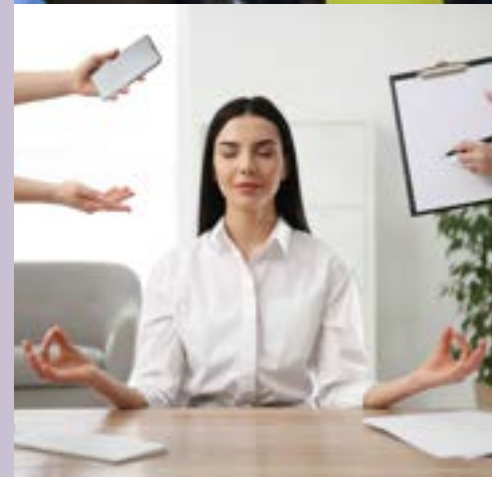
WHY BURNOUT HAPPENS & WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and mentally drained? You're not alone.

Burnout isn't just feeling tired, it's an overwhelming sense of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that can make even simple tasks feel impossible. Whether you're juggling a demanding career, caregiving responsibilities, or the pressures of daily life, burnout slowly chips away at your energy, motivation, and well-being.

I know this because I've seen it firsthand, not just in my clients but in my own life. As a therapist, consultant, and mother, I've had moments where everything felt like too much. I've experienced the struggle of balancing responsibilities while trying to show up for others, and I've learned that burnout doesn't mean we're weak, it means we've been carrying too much for too long without the right tools to reset.

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This guide will walk you through:

- Recognizing burnout before it takes over
- Practical techniques to reset your nervous system
- How to say "no" and set boundaries without guilt
- Building a sustainable rest and recovery plan
- Preventing burnout before it returns



"Burnout is not a failure, it's a signal to reset."

Burnout is not a personal failure, it's a signal that something needs to change. My hope is that by the time you finish this guide, you'll feel more in control, more energized, and more empowered to take back your well-being.

WHAT BURNOUT CAN LEAD TO

Burnout isn't just feeling exhausted, it's a state of chronic stress that, if left unchecked, can spiral into deeper mental, emotional, and physical health challenges. Many people try to push through it, thinking things will eventually get better, but burnout rarely resolves on its own. Without intentional recovery, it can lead to:

Emotional & Mental Health Struggles

- Persistent anxiety, irritability, or numbness
- Increased risk of depression and hopelessness
- Feeling disconnected or emotionally drained, even around loved ones

Cognitive & Productivity Decline

- Trouble focusing, making decisions, or remembering things
- Loss of motivation and creativity
- Feeling like you're constantly behind, even when working harder

Physical Health Consequences

- Chronic fatigue and sleep disturbances
- Increased headaches, muscle tension, or digestive issues
- Weakened immune system, leading to frequent illness

Strained Relationships & Isolation

- Lack of patience with family, friends, or colleagues
- Withdrawing from social activities due to exhaustion or overwhelm
- Feeling resentful, unappreciated, or disconnected

Loss of Passion & Purpose

- No longer finding joy in things you once loved
- Feeling trapped in your responsibilities
- Questioning your career, relationships, or long-term goals

What signs of burnout have you noticed in yourself?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and is set against a dark background.

STEP-BY-STEP BURNOUT RECOVERY

STEP - 1

Why am I feeling this way? Identifying Your Burnout Triggers

Understanding what's draining you is the first step to recovery.

Burnout doesn't happen overnight. It builds slowly-one overpacked schedule, one impossible deadline, one emotional weight at a time. Before you can reset and recover, you need to recognize what's causing the exhaustion in the first place.

The 5 Major Burnout Triggers

Emotional Overload

- Carrying the weight of other people's problems (caregivers, therapists, parents, leaders).
- Feeling responsible for everyone else's happiness.
- Suppressing your own emotions to keep the peace.

Work & Career Stress

- Unrealistic expectations or an unmanageable workload.
- Feeling undervalued or overworked in your job.
- Constant pressure to be productive with no real downtime.

Lack of Boundaries

- Saying yes when you want to say no.
- Always being available, responding to work emails at night, and constantly helping others.
- Feeling guilty when prioritizing your own needs.

Mental & Physical Exhaustion

- Chronic sleep deprivation or poor self-care.
- Running on caffeine, sugar, or sheer willpower just to get through the day.
- Never feeling truly rested, even after a break.

Disconnection & Isolation

- Feeling disengaged from things you once enjoyed.
- Withdrawing from social interactions because you're too tired to engage.
- Feeling like no one understands how exhausted you are.

Self-Reflection: What's Draining You?

Take a moment to identify your top burnout triggers. Circle any that apply to you:

I feel like I have to be "on" all the time for others.

My work or responsibilities never seem to end.

I don't have clear boundaries between my time and other people's demands.

I rarely take breaks, and when I do, I still feel exhausted.

I feel disconnected from things I once enjoyed.

I have trouble sleeping or experience physical signs of stress (headaches, muscle tension, digestive issues).

If you checked two or more, your burnout is not just stress, it's a sign that something needs to change.



ACTION STEP: START TRACKING YOUR ENERGY

Over the next few days, take **5 minutes each night** to reflect on these three questions:

What drained my energy today?

What gave me even a small moment of relief or joy?

What's one small thing I can adjust tomorrow to protect my energy?

This simple awareness exercise **helps you see patterns** and **clarify what needs to shift** before moving into burnout recovery strategies.

Next Step: Now that you've identified your burnout triggers, let's reset your nervous system so you can start feeling relief.



STEP - 2

Resetting Your Nervous System

When burnout takes over, your nervous system gets stuck in a cycle of stress. The goal isn't just to "relax" it's to actively shift your body and mind out of survival mode and into a state of calm and balance.

Below are simple yet powerful techniques to help you reset, recharge, and regulate your stress response.

Breathing Exercises: Calming Your Body & Mind

When we're overwhelmed, our breathing often becomes shallow and rapid, which signals to the brain that we are in danger. Conscious breathing helps override this stress response and tells the body, *I am safe*.

The 4-7-8 Breathing Method (Great for Anxiety & Sleep)

Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 seconds.

Hold your breath for 7 seconds.

Exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 seconds.

Repeat 4 times.

Why It Works: This technique engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps slow the heart rate and reduce stress. It's especially helpful before bed or in moments of high anxiety.

Box Breathing (Great for Focus & Grounding)

Inhale for 4 seconds.

Hold your breath for 4 seconds.

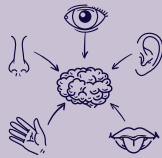
Exhale for 4 seconds.

Hold your breath again for 4 seconds.

Repeat the cycle 4-5 times.

Why It Works: Used by athletes, military personnel, and first responders, this method helps restore focus and control when feeling overwhelmed.

Try It: Picture tracing a square in your mind, one side for each step of the breath. This visual + breath combo reinforces relaxation.



Sensory Grounding: Reconnecting to the Present

When burnout makes you feel disconnected or stuck in stress, engaging your senses can bring you back into the present moment.

Touch-Based Grounding (For Immediate Relief)

Hold something textured (a smooth stone, a soft fabric, a cold ice cube).
Run your hands under warm water and focus on the sensation.
Press your feet firmly into the ground and feel the stability beneath you.

Why It Works: Physical sensations anchor you in the present, helping your brain shift out of stress mode.

Sound-Based Grounding (For Mental Reset)

Listen to calming instrumental music or nature sounds.
Hum or sing vibrations help regulate your nervous system.
Name three sounds around you (birds chirping, a clock ticking, distant chatter).

Why It Works: Sound can either calm or overstimulate, choose soothing sounds to guide your body toward relaxation.

Movement-Based Grounding (For Releasing Tension)

Shake out your hands or do gentle stretches to release stored stress.
Take a mindful walk, focusing on each step and the feeling of your feet against the ground.
Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method: Identify 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, and 1 you taste.

Why It Works: Stress often gets stuck in the body movement helps release built-up tension and reset your focus.





Quick Reset Plan: Try This When You Feel Burnt Out

Step 1: Do 4 rounds of 4-7-8 breathing.

Step 2: Hold something cool or textured to engage your senses.

Step 3: Take a 2-minute walk or stretch to release stress.

Step 4: Play calming music or hum softly for relaxation.

This process only takes a few minutes but can make a huge difference in how you feel. The more you practice these small resets, the easier it becomes to manage stress before burnout takes over.

STEP - 3

Setting Boundaries Without Guilt

Saying No Without Feeling Selfish

Burnout often happens not just because we're doing too much, but because we feel like we can't say no to work demands, family expectations, or social pressures. Many of us have been conditioned to believe that setting boundaries is selfish or that saying no means we're letting people down. But in reality, boundaries are essential for protecting your time, energy, and mental well-being.

Setting boundaries doesn't mean shutting people out, it means creating healthier ways of engaging with others while preserving your own needs.



How to Recognize When You're Overcommitted

If you're constantly feeling drained, resentful, or stretched too thin, you might be taking on more than you can handle. Ask yourself:

Am I saying yes to things I don't actually have time or energy for?

Do I feel guilty or anxious when setting a boundary?

Am I prioritizing others' needs at the expense of my own well-being?

Do I often think, "I'll rest when things slow down" but they never do?

Have I been neglecting my own needs because I don't want to disappoint others?

If you answered yes to more than one of these, it's time to reassess your commitments and start setting boundaries that protect your well-being.

The Art of Saying No: 3 Boundary-Setting Scripts

You don't have to justify or over-explain your boundaries. A simple, clear response is often enough. Here are three scripts tailored for different areas of life:

1. At Work: Protecting Your Time Without Guilt

Scenario: A colleague or boss asks you to take on extra work when you're already overloaded.

What to Say:

"I appreciate you thinking of me for this, but I'm currently at full capacity and won't be able to take this on right now. I'd be happy to revisit it in the future if my workload allows."

♦ **Why This Works:** It's professional, respectful, and firm. It communicates your capacity without leaving the door open for negotiation.

2. With Family: Setting Emotional & Physical Boundaries

Scenario: A family member expects you to always be available for emotional support, errands, or problem-solving.

What to Say:

"I love you and want to support you, but I also need to take care of my own well-being. I won't be able to [do this task/talk at this moment], but I'd love to check in later when I have more energy to be fully present."

♦ **Why This Works:** It validates your care for them while maintaining your limits you're setting a boundary without shutting them out.

3. In Personal Life: Protecting Your Energy & Time

Scenario: A friend keeps inviting you to events or favors that you feel obligated to say yes to, even when you need rest.

What to Say:

"That sounds great, but I really need some downtime this week. Let's find another time when I can be fully present and enjoy it."

♦ **Why This Works:** It removes guilt and over-explanation while reinforcing that your time and energy are valuable.

Boundary-Setting Mindset Shift: You're Not Responsible for Others' Reactions

One of the biggest struggles with boundaries is worrying about how others will react. The truth is:

- ✗ You are not responsible for other people's disappointment.
- ✗ You do not need to justify protecting your energy.
- ✗ You do not have to over-explain your reasons.

Setting boundaries doesn't make you selfish, it allows you to show up fully and intentionally in the areas that matter most.

Next Step: Now that you've identified where you need boundaries, let's focus on creating a recover.

STEP - 4

Creating a Rest & Recovery Plan

Rest isn't a luxury, it's essential for resilience.

Burnout recovery isn't just about stopping, it's about intentionally replenishing your energy. Many of us mistake passive rest (collapsing on the couch after an exhausting day) for true restoration. But real recovery requires active, intentional choices that give your body and mind what they need to heal.

The 3 Types of Rest You Need

Physical Rest (Recharging Your Body)

Prioritize consistent, high-quality sleep, not just more hours, but better sleep hygiene.

Take micro-breaks throughout the day (5 minutes of stretching, deep breathing, or stepping outside).

Release tension with gentle movement, like yoga, walking, or stretching.

Mental Rest (Clearing the Noise in Your Mind)

Give your brain a break from constant stimulation limit screen time, notifications, and multitasking.

Schedule tech-free time to create moments of stillness.

Use a "brain dump" exercise to offload worries before bed.

Emotional Rest (Letting Go of Stress & Expectations)

Spend time with people who nourish, not drain, your energy.

Allow yourself to say no without guilt (Step 3 helps with this!).

Create small daily rituals that bring joy (reading, music, journaling, prayer).

Creating Your Personal Recovery Plan

Take 5 minutes to fill in this simple framework for yourself:

What's one thing I can do to improve my sleep or physical energy?

Example: Set a bedtime alarm to remind me to wind down.

How can I give my mind a break from stress today?

Example: Take a 15-minute walk without my phone.

What's one thing I can do to reset emotionally?

Example: Spend 10 minutes doing something just for me.

Small, intentional actions build real change.

The key isn't to overhaul your life overnight, but to start making choices that restore, rather than drain, your energy.

STEP - 5

Preventing Burnout Moving Forward

What to do when stress creeps back in.

Even after recovering from burnout, stress will still happen. The goal isn't to eliminate stress but to develop habits that prevent it from turning into burnout again.

5 Strategies for Long-Term Burnout Prevention

1 Regularly Check In With Yourself

- Once a week, ask: How am I really feeling?
- Notice early signs of burnout (irritability, exhaustion, feeling detached).
- Adjust your schedule before stress builds up.

2 Prioritize Energy Over Productivity

- Focus on what truly matters, not just getting things done.

- Recognize that doing less can often mean achieving more.

3 Protect Your Boundaries (Revisit Step 3)

- Continually reassess what you say yes to.
- Remind yourself: Every “yes” to something is a “no” to something else.

4 Create a “Burnout Emergency Kit”

- A personal list of go-to reset activities when you feel overwhelmed.
- Example: Breathing exercises, stepping outside, calling a trusted friend, journaling.
- Save it somewhere easy to access so you don't have to think about it when stressed.

5 Rebuild a Life That Energizes You

- Make space for joy, hobbies, and connection.
- Remember: You don't exist just to work or take care of others.



Final Reflection: Moving Forward

Burnout doesn't mean you're weak, it means you've been strong for too long without enough support.

Take a moment to acknowledge your progress:

You've identified what's been draining you.

You've learned strategies to reset and recover.

You now have tools to protect your energy moving forward.

You deserve a life that feels balanced, fulfilling, and sustainable and this is just the beginning of reclaiming it.

Let us start by writing down 3 steps you are now committed to taking!



When It's Time to Seek Professional Support

If you've tried these strategies and are still feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, or emotionally drained, it may be time to seek additional support. Burnout can be more than just stress, it can impact your ability to function in daily life, maintain relationships, and feel like yourself again.

A good rule of thumb is to assess your symptoms based on their duration, frequency, and intensity:

Duration: Have these feelings persisted for weeks or months despite efforts to reset?

Frequency: Are you experiencing burnout symptoms daily or almost every day?

Intensity: Are your symptoms so overwhelming that they're affecting your ability to work, take care of responsibilities, or connect with loved ones?

If burnout is disrupting your ability to function, it's important to reach out for professional guidance.

I offer two options for those seeking support:

Psychotherapy with Malka Shaw, LCSW – For individuals seeking ongoing therapy to address burnout, stress, trauma, and emotional well-being.

90-Minute Consultation – A one-time deep-dive session designed to help you assess where you are, gain clarity on what's keeping you stuck, and create a personalized action plan to get back on track.

You don't have to navigate this alone. Seeking help is not a sign of failure, it's a step toward reclaiming your energy, clarity, and well-being. If you're ready to explore professional support, let's connect.

Schedule a complimentary 10 minute phone call [here](https://malka-shaw.clientsecure.me/) Please use this link to set up our consultation call, which must be set up 24 hrs in advance:

<https://malka-shaw.clientsecure.me/>

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