



reba

Technical
Training Guide

BEATING BURNOUT



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Editor's welcome



With skills shortages from bakers to biochemists in the news and entire industries having to rethink their working models, it's never been more important for employers to support the mental health of employees.

Unrealistic work pressures, organisational change and personal worries can all contribute to poor wellbeing and potentially to burnout. That is a risk both for individuals and for businesses. High-quality, skilled employees will head for the door in what is now an open market for jobs. For employees that do experience burnout, lengthy stress-related absences from work hits business productivity, impacts other employees and damages corporate reputation.

Avoiding burnout requires commitment to deep-seated cultural change, from benefits design, through to workforce planning and management practices.

That means addressing conflicts between wellbeing goals and business objectives, such as offering benefits to support mental wellbeing while still pressuring employees into an 'always available' culture, or actively rewarding behaviours that can cause burnout. Putting employee wellbeing at the heart of business strategy – and meaning it – is a crucial starting point.

Line managers, too, have an important role in preventing burnout, and spotting when colleagues are struggling. However, a token 'how are you?' at the start of a one-to-one meeting is far too easy to brush aside with 'I'm fine' and a swift move onto the next question. Managers may need help themselves to ensure they are able to join the dots between changes in behaviour that they see, and what employees are willing to share with them. That takes time, trust, and expertise from managers, plus support from the top to create an environment where employees can answer 'How are you?' with 'I'm struggling'.

A workplace that is focused on avoiding burnout is better placed to attract and retain a productive workforce than one which must continually pick up the pieces and support employees after burnout has happened. This guide will help you identify some of the core causes of burnout, why it matters to businesses, and how to reduce the impact that it is having on your organisation.

Maggie Williams
Content Director, REBA

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Sponsor's comment



Helping employees stay healthy and happy should always be a priority in the world of work. When health suffers, so does quality of work and productivity. As burnout is far from fading away, businesses must do their best to help prevent it, and keep their workforce as happy and healthy as possible.

Arrange regular one-to-one check-ins: Asking employees how they're feeling and if there's anything they want to discuss, like home-life or workload, can provide valuable support. Physical and mental exhaustion are primary symptoms of burnout. Financial issues can also put a strain on mental wellbeing so it's important to provide help and guidance services when colleagues may need some financial advice. Showing understanding and offering the right support can really help alleviate people's anxieties and reassure them that they're not alone.

A manageable workload: Are your employees happy with the amount of work they have? Not everyone is vocal about how they're coping. All it takes sometimes is a quick check-in, 'how's your workload' or 'need any help?' Everyone may struggle from time to time depending on life circumstances and state of health. Even something simple as not sleeping properly. It can all have a knock-on effect which could lead to eventual burnout.

Encourage logging off when the working day is over: If an employee is constantly working beyond their working hours, something can't be right. In some instances, the increase in working from home has meant that work and home life is blending into one. It's a relatively new problem for many which we need to address before we have a bigger problem on our hands.

Recognise and reward great work: Reward and recognise those who deserve it, fairly. Unfair treatment can lead to resentment and leave a colleague feeling stressed and undervalued. Words of encouragement can give people the boost they need to carry on doing their best, no matter how small.

Provide a health care tool kit: Health plans can make it much easier for people to look after their mental and physical health, with confidential counselling sessions, gym membership discounts and treatments like physiotherapy. At Simplyhealth, we firmly believe in prevention over cure. To stay one step ahead of the cause before it takes hold of employees, you need to ensure help is available as soon as they need it.

Thankfully, many more businesses have been stepping up to provide better mental health support for their employees since the pandemic. There has been a greater awareness of mental health issues with people working from home more, staying in during lockdowns, and generally coping with an unforeseen dramatic change in lifestyle. Where burnout is more likely than ever, it's up to businesses to look after their employees as well as possible, if they want to continue with their success in a rapidly changing world.

Sian Evans

Head of Leadership and Development



Simplyhealth
All together healthier



Chapter 1: Why organisations must tackle employee burnout

Burnout is a debilitating condition brought on by having to deal with excessive amounts of stress and pressure. Long seen in professional sportspeople and people in the public eye, it's also a serious workplace health issue.

Its prevalence in the workplace saw the World Health Organisation include burnout in its 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases in 2019. It stated that, while it is not classified as a medical condition, burnout is 'an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'.

Sadly, there's also evidence that workplace burnout is becoming more common. According to research by HR News, online searches for burnout related terms have increased by 41% annually since 2017.

Effects of burnout

Although it's summed up by one simple word, burnout affects employees in a number of different ways. Physical and mental exhaustion is the primary symptom, with this potentially leading to feelings of defeat, negativity and cynicism about the job. It can also cause behaviour changes, such as irritability and withdrawal from colleagues.

These symptoms can also manifest themselves in poor physical health. Headaches, poor sleep and stomach aches are common but an employee may also suffer more coughs and colds as a result of the effect on their immune system.

As well as having serious health implications for individuals, burnout can also affect the organisation. Higher sickness absence rates and more presenteeism will squeeze productivity and profits. Similarly, it can push up turnover, as employees look for less stressful employment or fall out of the workforce altogether.





Burnout contagion

What's more, although burnout may sound like a very personal matter to do with an individual's response to workloads and personal pressures, it can also be contagious. Thanks to our desire for social connections, we'll often mimic the behaviours and emotions of those around us. If you're working alongside a colleague who's experiencing burnout, this can rub off on you too.

Given the risk it presents to individual employees but also to the entire workforce, it's an occupational health risk that organisations must take very seriously.

The pandemic and burnout – how it's made matters worse

Work has changed significantly as a result of the pandemic but alongside bringing benefits such as more flexible working and less commuting, it's also increased the risk of burnout.



A survey by Mental Health UK in March 2021 found that 46% of UK workers feel more prone to extreme levels of stress compared with a year before, with women and young people particularly susceptible.

Employers have also observed worrying trends in working practices. [The CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work Report 2021](#) found that 84% of respondents have seen presenteeism both in the workplace (75%) and while working at home (77%) in 2020. In addition, 70% have seen some form of leaveism, such as working outside contracted hours or using holiday entitlement to work.

The pandemic, and particularly some of the shifts in working practices has fuelled these trends. As well as worries about money, job security and physical health, working from home doesn't suit everyone. For some it's the isolation that they find difficult, while others struggle as there's no longer a boundary between work and home life. All of these factors can lead to an employee working longer hours, and increasing their risk of burnout.





Chapter 2: What causes burnout?

Burnout is a work-related syndrome, resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Understanding what causes it is essential for organisations looking to beat burnout.

Academic research (1) identifies six areas of work that can contribute to burnout. These are as follows:



Workload

Having too much work to do can make an employee feel under incredible pressure. Getting everything done can eat into their free time, making rest and recovery difficult, and forcing them to shelve plans for professional development and growth.



Control

Shifting priorities, a lack of resources or knowledge to complete a task and work emails around the clock can make an employee feel like they have no control over what they do at work.



Reward

When an employee feels they're not recognised or rewarded appropriately for the work they do, they can feel overlooked, undervalued and may even question their abilities.



Community

The social element of work plays a large part in employees' sense of value. If there's a lack of support or trust within a team, this can make work more stressful and lead to feelings of burnout.



Fairness

From being overlooked for promotion to not getting as much praise as a colleague, when an employee believes they're treated unfairly it can lead to resentment and worries that they're not doing a good job.



Values

Where an employee does not share the same values as their employer, or they feel their ethics are being compromised by something they have to do at work, it can lead to questions about what they're doing and a higher risk of burnout.

Although the WHO puts the blame for burnout squarely on the organisation, external factors can also contribute. As an example, during lockdown Mental Health UK identified nine factors that could significantly contribute to burnout.

Many of these are just as relevant after the pandemic and include money worries; working from home; isolation; physical health; sleep; relationships; and caring for others. As these external stresses can increase the risk of burnout, it's essential that organisations provide broad support, that goes beyond the issues of the workplace.

(1) *Six areas of worklife: a model of the organisational context of burnout* by Michael P Leiter of Arcadia University and Christina Maslach of the University of California at Berkeley.

Technology – a force for good and evil

Technology has transformed the workplace, improving productivity and making it easy to catch up with colleagues. But, while it brings benefits, it can also contribute to burnout with employees struggling to switch off in the 'always-on' culture.



Email usage is a prime example of this. A study by the McKinsey Global Institute found that the average worker spent 28% of their working week dealing with emails – the equivalent of more than two hours a day.

Adopting best practice around email usage can help employees take back control. Simple steps could include creating guidelines around email content and when to send emails to providing tips on more effective email habits. For instance, turning off notifications and only checking email once an hour can save time and improve focus.

It may also be worth breaking away from emails. For some exchanges, speaking face-to-face can be more effective and sociable and it may also be worth implementing a messaging service specifically for urgent communications.



Chapter 3: Identifying burnout – in the office and remotely

Identifying when employees are suffering from burnout – or at risk of it – is essential. Knowing the warning signs will ensure that action can be taken to address the causes and provide appropriate support to alleviate the symptoms.

As they have a day-to-day relationship with employees, line managers have a key role to play in this. Training them to recognise the early signs that someone is struggling can make a significant difference.

Spotting the signs

Burnout can manifest itself in a variety of different ways but changes in an employee's behaviour or productivity should set alarm bells ringing. Some may work longer hours to compensate for a dip in performance, while others may take more time off due to exhaustion or physical health problems such as headaches and stomach problems.

An employee suffering from burnout may also be more withdrawn and irritable. This could manifest itself in them not wanting to take part in social activities or causing arguments in the workplace.

Remote challenges

Working alongside employees can make it easy to spot signs of burnout, but the shift to remote working presents a challenge for organisations with employees able to hide their behaviour in emails and phone calls.

Regular one-to-ones by video can help but it's also sensible for line managers to make employees' mental wellbeing part of this call. Simply asking them how they are and whether they have any work issues will normalise this conversation and encourage them to be more open if they are feeling under pressure.

Support mechanism

Talking to employees about their emotions and the pressures they're facing can be daunting for some line managers, but it's not necessary for them to provide a full counselling service. Instead, it's important that organisations provide them with the tools to help employees suffering from burnout.

Knowing which benefits and support services are available will enable them to signpost employees to appropriate support such as the EAP or the company's mental health policy.

It's also important that organisations empower line managers to adjust employees' workloads or duties. Removing or reducing the cause of the problem can help to prevent problems.

Common signs of burnout

Given the debilitating effects of burnout, it's important to be able to recognise the warning signs in colleagues – but also in yourself.

Common signs to look out for include:

- Exhaustion, both physical and emotional
- Feelings of helplessness or defeat
- Negativity and cynicism
- Self-doubt and lack of confidence
- Procrastination and taking longer to get things done
- Changes in behaviour, such as being more withdrawn or irritable
- Changes in working patterns, for instance longer hours or more absence
- Physical health problems such as headaches, insomnia and stomach upsets





Chapter 4: Creating the right culture

With work playing such a major part in employee burnout, organisations have an opportunity to create a culture that can help to prevent it. Setting expectations around work practices and providing the right support mechanisms can make a significant difference.

Setting standards

Where there's a risk of burnout, setting expectations around working hours and practices can show employees what is, and isn't, expected of them. Formal policies can outline details such as how many hours employees are expected to work and how to manage their time if they want to work more flexibly.

Getting management buy-in is essential too. Senior management can lead by example, showing employees that it's perfectly acceptable to leave on time, take holidays and keep emails within working hours.

Healthy work practices

It's also prudent to make sure that the organisation isn't inadvertently encouraging burnout among employees. Rewarding long hours or contacting employees outside of work hours can pile on the pressure.

Good practice around holidays is important too. The 'always on' culture can lead to people feeling they can't take time off. Encouraging employees to use their holiday allowance and to leave the work phone in a desk drawer can help them unwind.

Awareness campaign

Stigmas and misunderstandings around burnout mean employees don't always feel comfortable asking for help. Raising awareness of burnout and regularly communicating the support that's available – whether that's an EAP, a mindfulness app or a mental health day will show employees that the company cares about their mental wellbeing.

This positive culture is further enhanced where mental health becomes part of the workplace conversation. This could be a senior manager talking about the mental health issues they've faced or the inclusion of a regular 'how are you feeling?' question in a weekly check-in with a manager.

Additionally, as mental health is linked to other aspects of wellbeing, it's sensible to promote other health benefits. Tips on everything from stopping smoking, exercise and getting a good night's sleep can all help to reduce the risk of burnout.

Benefits to support employees

Health and wellbeing benefits are valuable tools for supporting employees with burnout but can also play an important role in prevention. Here are some of the key benefits available:



- EAPs – these confidential telephone and online services provide access to a range of support and practical advice on issues that can affect an employees' wellbeing. To maximise their value, it's worth promoting the variety of support available.
- Mental health apps – ranging from mindfulness and meditation apps through to coaching and counselling, these help employees deal with stress and other issues while also demonstrating that the organisation takes mental health seriously.
- Health and wellbeing programmes – encouraging employees to be more active or to improve their diet or sleep habits will benefit their mental as well as physical health. This can reduce the risk of burnout.





Quiz

1. **How does the World Health Organisation define burnout?**
 - A An occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed
 - B An occupational phenomenon resulting from the shift to home working
 - C A medical condition
 - D A condition affecting professional sportspeople and celebrities

2. **Online searches for burnout related terms have increased by what percentage since 2017?**
 - A 11%
 - B 200%
 - C 79%
 - D 41%

3. **What is the primary symptom of burnout?**
 - A Negativity and cynicism
 - B Physical exhaustion
 - C Physical and mental exhaustion
 - D Headaches and stomach complaints

4. **According to a survey by Mental Health UK, what percentage of UK workers felt more stressed in March 2021?**
 - A 26%
 - B 36%
 - C 46%
 - D 6%

5. **In the six areas of worklife model, which of the following is NOT a potential cause of burnout?**
 - A Reward
 - B Fairness
 - C Workload
 - D Promotion

6. **What percentage of the working week do employees spend on emails according to research by the McKinsey Global Institute?**
 - A 5%
 - B 10%
 - C 28%
 - D 33%

7. **How can line managers identify signs of burnout among employees who are working remotely?**
 - A Regular one-to-ones by video call
 - B Changes in productivity
 - C Ask them directly about their mental wellbeing
 - D All of the above

8. **Why is it important to get management buy-in when tackling burnout?**
 - A The risk of burnout increases with seniority
 - B They can set good examples for employees
 - C They can pick up the workload of burnt-out employees
 - D They can take longer holidays

9. **How can organisations help employees get the most from their holidays?**
 - A Encourage them to leave the work phone at work when they're on holiday
 - B Provide them with brochures of the top 10 resorts
 - C Give them a project to complete while they're away
 - D Let them check their email twice a day so they can stay on top of work

10. **From a burnout perspective, why is it good to promote health and wellbeing programmes that encourage employees to lead healthier lifestyles?**
 - A Going for a run will stop them checking their email
 - B It will make it easier for them to recover from burnout
 - C It benefits their health and reduces the risk of burnout
 - D It saves money on other areas of the health budget

1. A, 2. D, 3. C, 4. C, 5. D, 6. C, 7. D, 8. B, 9. A, 10. C.
Quiz: The answers



Who we are

Simplyhealth

Since 1872 we've been simplifying access to healthcare, and making it sustainable for the many. We believe that no-one should go without the healthcare support they need, which is why we aim to help as many people as possible to gain access to the right healthcare easily, quickly and affordably.

Our purpose hasn't changed. Today we're delighted to be the UK's leading provider of health plans and dental payment plans, which help individuals get support with their health, when they need it.

What Simplyhealth can provide your business:

Embracing a preventive healthcare model is proven to help build a resilient, productive workforce. We offer two types of preventive health plan:

- **Optimise – health and wellbeing**
Our corporate health plan, allowing employees to claim money back on a range of treatments including physio fees, dental check-ups, eye tests, and more. Our online portal provides access to a 24/7 employee assistance programme (EAP) and video GP appointments available 24/7. There are also other benefits that support overall health, like discounts on gym memberships.
- **Denplan – dental healthcare**
Our dental plans help patients avoid dental problems before they start. They enable patients to easily spread the cost of routine treatments, restorative treatment, accidents, and emergencies.

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Reward & Employee Benefits Association

REBA is the professional networking community for reward and benefits practitioners. We make members' working lives easier by saving them time, money and effort through sharing experience, ideas, data and insight with each other. We help members to pursue best practice, increase professionalism in the industry and prepare for upcoming changes. REBA also lobbies government on members' behalf.

What REBA does:

- Runs regular conferences and networking events, both face-to-face and virtually, through webinars and online platforms
- Produces benchmarking research, insight & data reports and analysis
- Delivers information that reward and benefits practitioners need to know, both online and in our daily emails
- Helps with supplier shortlisting and research
- Supports the reward and benefits community through our rebaLINK peer-to-peer networking platform

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