

STRESS VS BURNOUT

Learning How to Spot the Difference



Stress and burnout, though often used interchangeably, represent distinct experiences that can profoundly impact our physical and emotional well-being. While stress is a common response to life's challenges, burnout is a more profound state of physical and emotional exhaustion, typically stemming from prolonged, unmanaged stress.

Stress isn't always a negative reaction. It's often known as *eustress*, which can enhance alertness and goal achievement. For instance, a project deadline can sharpen your focus. On the flip side, stress leads to feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, this is referred to as *distress*.

What determines whether stress is positive or negative depends on various factors, including how you interpret the stressor, your emotional resources, and the potential for support. For instance, the same deadline that helps one person focus might cause anxiety for another. Similarly, a workload that motivates one person may distress someone else.

Exposure to ongoing stressors can lead to chronic stress, especially if you don't effectively manage stress early on. Chronic stress occurs when the stress response is consistently activated over an extended period or repeatedly.

Burnout is considered a form of prolonged distress.



According to research, burnout consists of three components...

- 1 Exhaustion.**
You're drained physically, mentally, or cognitively (or all of the above). Even rest doesn't help revive you.
- 2 Cynicism.**
You bring a sour mood to work, feel uninterested, and are often irritated, short-tempered, and detached from your team.
- 3 Inefficacy.**
You struggle to meet work demands despite knowing you were able to in the past.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE... IS IT chronic stress or burnout?

STRESS

Physical Symptoms

Headaches • Fatigue • Muscle tension • Sleep disturbances

Emotional Symptoms

Irritability • Anxiety • Mood swings • Feeling overwhelmed

Cognitive Symptoms

Difficulty concentrating • Forgetfulness • Racing thoughts • Negative thinking

Behavioural Symptoms

Social withdrawal • Increased use of substances (caffeine, alcohol) • Changes in eating habits

BURNOUT

Physical Symptoms

Chronic Fatigue • Frequent illness • Difficulty sleeping

Emotional Symptoms

Loss of enjoyment in activities • Detachment • Hopelessness • Cynicism

Cognitive Symptoms

Difficulty concentrating • Forgetfulness • Reduced creativity • Feeling disillusioned about work

Behavioural Symptoms

Decreased job performance • Detachment • Increased absenteeism • Escapist behaviours (overeating, excessive TV watching) • Social withdrawal



Sources: [PsychCentral](#) | [National Library of Medicine](#) | [HelpGuide.org](#) | Images by Unsplash