

# STRAIN TO STRENGTH

Strategies for Coping with Stress and Burnout



Almost [30%](#) of Canadians aged 35 to 49 consider most days to be *quite a bit* or *extremely* stressful. If you can relate, it's important to do something about it. Taking a vacation or a quick break from work is common advice, and while it sounds good, it's just a temporary fix to a much larger problem. Some [research](#) even suggests that the average vacation offers no improvement to your levels of energy or happiness when you return to work, especially if there's stressful travel involved.

If you're dealing with high levels of stress and burnout, it's going to take more than a few days with your toes in the sand to right the situation. You need to change your circumstances, otherwise, that time off will just be a brief pause from reality - and then you'll be exactly where you started. How do you make that happen? There are ways to deal with the causes of stress and develop proactive strategies to help you reduce your stress and anxiety levels for the long term.

Dealing with burnout requires the **Three R** approach...

**Recognize.** Watch for the warning signs of burnout.

**Reverse.** Undo the damage by seeking support and managing stress.

**Resilience.** Build your resilience to stress by taking care of your physical and emotional health.



## Own the Problem

Admitting you have a problem is the first step to solving it. It's a cliché, but it's true. We try to convince ourselves that if we wake up a bit earlier or push a little harder, things will be better tomorrow. Spoiler alert: that rarely happens. Putting in more effort won't kick burnout to the curb. If anything, it adds more stress.

What you really need is a conscious overhaul of your attitude, workload, and habits. Acknowledging the need for change is the pivotal move to banish burnout. How you go about it will be unique to you. Maybe you want to journal about the problem and rethink your usual responses, or perhaps you prefer hashing it out with a friend over coffee. Experiment with different approaches until you find what works for you.

## Prioritize self-care

Making sure your body and mind are healthy is crucial. Prioritize good sleep habits, nourishing meals, regular exercise, meaningful social connections, and activities that foster balance and well-being like meditation, journaling, and being in nature. If it feels challenging to fit these into your busy schedule, take a week to evaluate how you're spending your time. For each time block, note your activity, the company you're in, your emotional state (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is drained and 10 is energized), and the value of the activity. This assessment will unveil opportunities to minimize exposure to tasks, people, and situations that aren't essential and bring negativity. It will also highlight chances to invest more in activities that boost your energy and create space for rejuvenating, positive moments away from responsibilities.



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## Find Meaningful connections

The best antidote to burnout, especially when it's fueled by cynicism and inefficacy, is turning to others. Face-to-face conversation is one of the fastest ways to calm your nervous system and relieve stress. The person doesn't need to "fix" your problem, he just has to be a good listener who can tune in without zoning out or passing judgment.

**Reach out to those closest to you.** Opening up to family and friends shouldn't make you feel like a burden. Instead, it shows them that you trust them enough to confide in them. It's a compliment that can strengthen your friendship. Try not to focus only on what's stressing you out and make the time you spend together positive and enjoyable.

**Be more sociable with your coworkers.** Connecting with people you work with can help create a burnout buffer. When you take a break, skip the smartphone and engage in conversation with your colleagues.

**Limit contact with negative people.** Spending time with individuals who consistently express negativity and complain can drag down your mood and outlook. If you can't avoid interacting with a negative person, try to limit the amount of time you spend together.

**Connect with a cause or group that's meaningful to you.** Getting involved offers a platform to engage with like-minded people about how to deal with everyday stress. It's an avenue not only to seek advice but also to forge new connections. If your line of work has a professional association, you can attend meetings to connect with others navigating the same workplace challenges.

## Practice the art of doing nothing

In our fast-paced world, the idea of doing 'nothing,' being still, or taking a pause feels foreign to many. Instead, we often opt for *compensatory* leisure like unwinding with a drink, or *spillover* leisure like collapsing on the couch and binge-watching Netflix or mindlessly scrolling through social media. Unfortunately, these types of leisure don't offer the physical and mental replenishment we need.

One of the best things you can do for your brain is actually nothing at all! Indulge in quiet time to sit and focus on your breathing or gaze out a window. If that feels strange, identify activities that genuinely replenish you and incorporate them consistently into your life. Even a simple hike with your dog can do wonders compared to scrolling through Instagram for the 18th time today.



## Reduce exposure to stressors

Believe it or not, you can simply avoid a lot of stress by adjusting your approach and realizing that you don't have to shoulder everything. Learn to say no to non-essential commitments. You have a lot of responsibilities and demands on your time. At a certain point, you cross the line between being charitable and being foolish. Saying "no" translates into more time for yourself and activities that bring you calm.

Take charge of your surroundings and your tasks. If traffic makes your morning commute a nightmare, consider leaving early or choose a less congested route. Label your to-do list with A's, B's, and C's according to importance. On busy days, focus on the essentials and scratch the C's from your list.

