If constant stress is making you feel helpless, disengaged and exhausted, you may be experiencing burnout. Burnout is a state of physical or emotional exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you are overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet constant work and life demands. EAP Counselor Maureen Barker, LCSW notes, “It is very common in the workplace, no matter your profession.”

**Is it Stress or Burnout?**
Stress and burnout are related, but they are not the same. Stress is the result of too many pressures and demands, but feeling your situation will improve if you can gain control. Burnout is the opposite of that. Burnout builds gradually over time, and occurs when your stress has reached a level and duration that you feel detached, empty and exhausted. When you have lost your motivation, feel you have no control, and are hopeless that your situation, you have reached burnout. According to Barker, “Burnout leads to feeling depleted and the tank fells empty. Typically, people need to do something to fill up the tank. Having an open mind on possible solutions is essential to finding balance in today’s world.”

**What’s Your Risk?**
Although stress and burnout are not the same, your level of stress can indicate your risk for burnout. Chronic stress can lead to burnout. Take this brief survey to assess your stress level: [sutterhealth.org/stress-level](http://sutterhealth.org/stress-level).

**Building Resiliency**
If you recognize some signs of burnout in yourself – or are already experiencing burnout, now is the time to act. You can negatively impact your physical and emotional wellbeing by not dealing with the issue. The good news is you can learn to help yourself overcome burnout. By building resiliency, you can feel healthy and positive again.

Resiliency is not a trait you have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed. If you have high stress, there are positive coping mechanisms you can learn to improve your physical and emotional health.

**Ways to Build Resiliency**
Some of the ways to take action and build resiliency are:

- **Take a mindful minute.** Mindfulness exercises are proven to help reduce our stress levels. Mindfulness meditation involves breathing practice, mental imagery, awareness of body and mind while helping you turn attention away from stressful thoughts.
WATCH FOR BURNOUT
Some of the signs of burnout include:
- Being cynical, critical and not caring
- Expressing irritation and impatience with those around you
- Feeling unsatisfied, disillusioned and unappreciated
- Having no energy for work or home life
- Experiencing a change in sleep habits
- Suffering from unexplained headaches or stomach and bowel problems

WHAT CAUSES BURNOUT?
Burnout is often work-related, but other factors can contribute to it too, including your lifestyle and personality traits. Frequent causes of burnout are:
- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work
- Lack of recognition or reward for good work
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations
- Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment
- Working too much, without time for socializing or relaxing
- Lack of close, supportive relationships
- Not getting enough sleep
- Being a perfectionist; nothing is ever good enough
- Having a negative view of yourself and the world

Seek support. It’s important to have good relationships with family, friends and coworkers. Accepting help from those who care about and will listen to you, will strengthen resilience. Social support groups can also be a healthy connection.

Frame the way you look at work. Try to find some value in your work. Discuss concerns with your supervisor. Work together to establish clear expectations, reach compromises or solutions. Take time off to have a complete break from work and recharge. If you are truly unhappy, explore changing your job or career.

Take care of yourself. Healthy eating and exercise help keep your body in balance. Try to integrate daily exercise into your lifestyle. Even small amounts of exercise, such as a 30 minute walk can help relieve stress. Maintaining a balanced diet is even more important when you are stressed to strengthen your body’s resistance to illness. Barker recommends individuals, “Make a personal commitment to take appropriate breaks and meals when working.”

Get a good night’s rest. Sleep restores the body and mind. Strive for consistent sleep and wake times. Aim for seven to eight hours a night.

Take a break. Take time for yourself. Enjoy watching a favorite movie, get a massage, or maybe have a picnic in the park. Take time to focus on what brings you joy and peace.

Get professional help. A licensed mental health professional can assist you with developing an appropriate strategy to combat burnout. Sutter EAP can help connect you with a licensed therapist. Check with your health plan on the mental health benefits available to you. Explore online resources for tools and strategies to combat burnout.

Burnout does not have to be a way of life. It can take a harmful toll on your physical and mental health and jeopardize relationships. Explore the steps you can take to help reduce stress, improve your relationships at home and work, and rediscover joy and meaning in work and life. If you notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness and feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities and activities, consult with your physician or a licensed mental health professional.

Maureen Barker has 28 years of experience as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in mental health. Having experienced burnout herself in the past, Maureen attests to the importance and effectiveness of practicing these skills to prevent and address existing burnout.

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Other Sources: American Psychological Association, Mayo Clinic, Optum Behavioral Health

Call 800-477-2258 today to determine what EAP resources and services you are eligible for.