Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Burnout & COVID-19

COVID-19 has meant huge changes in the ways in which we live and work, and many people are feeling the strain after prolonged quarantine and lockdown measures. If you're working from home, helping children distance learn, managing caregiving responsibilities, or have faced any of the other challenges the COVID-19 pandemic may have brought with it, you might be experiencing burnout.

How to recognize burnout

You might think of burnout as working too hard and not having a healthy work/life balance, but COVID-19 has caused major changes in a lot of people's lives, not just at work, and this can lead to burnout.

Usually burnout is triggered by short periods of time when stress overload feels unavoidable. However, the events surrounding COVID-19 may have stretched this period out for many people, making it difficult to use short-term coping mechanisms.

The common signs of burnout include:

- emotional and physical exhaustion
- a sense of cynicism and alienation
- low self-esteem
- impatience
- negative attitude
- feeling of detachment
- listlessness

How to address burnout

Take a look at your priorities. You may not be able to take things like childcare, caregiving responsibilities, and your job off your to do list, but take a second look at all the things you try to accomplish in a day. What can you cut back on or cut out entirely to preserve your energy?

Say "no" to new projects without getting rid of older ones. It can be tempting to take on more responsibility without question—be it a new project at work, home, or in your neighbourhood. Enforcing your boundaries and getting used to saying "no" is the best way to make sure you don't get overwhelmed. If you find saying no difficult, practice so that it feels more natural—for example, say, "I'm sorry, but I'm not able to take on any more work projects right now." If you can't say no to a new project, ask for help prioritizing everything that's on your plate.

Talk to your loved ones. Your loved ones might not be aware that you may be experiencing burnout. Ask for help with lightening your load at home through sharing tasks. Even if they can't help you with everything going on, it can be helpful to let them know you may be in need of emotional support.

Talk to your boss. This can be hard, especially if your team has been scaled back during lockdown or your company has experienced other major changes. However, if you're burned out you won't be able to be productive. Talk to your manager about your most prioritized projects as well as taking time off to recharge.
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Plan a break. This could look like personal days off work, getting an outside caregiver to help with a loved one so that you can get a day off, or letting friends and family know that there will be a day when you will be going "offline" to recharge. Use your time away to rest, try a new hobby, engage in self-care, or do something for yourself that you've been putting off.

Get a change of scenery—even if you can't leave your house. If you work from home, you might think that taking a day off might feel like another day in the office. But there are many things you can do to make home a welcoming place for a staycation. Turn alerts off on your cell phone. Change up your routines by indulging in activities you enjoy, such as watching TV or reading. Try a mindfulness practice such as meditating. If you're able to go outside, go for a walk through nature for a change in pace.

Make sure that you're taking care of yourself. Are you eating healthy foods? Are you making time to get adequate sleep and exercise? Are you sharing your struggles with friends and family, or do you take on the role of the person who only gets leaned on? Are you making time for yourself? As you think about the things you need to cut back on, take some time to consider what things you want to *add* to your life to protect yourself from burnout. You might find our article **50 Ways to Practice Self-Care** useful.

Burnout can sometimes feel difficult to address, but it's important to deal with the issue. If you're in need of additional help, your assistance program is here for you. Caring counsellors are available to speak to you 24/7.