



# BURNOUT VS. STRESS: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE



## Why It Matters

Everyone experiences stress — but when it becomes chronic and unmanaged, it can lead to burnout, a serious state of physical and emotional exhaustion that impacts performance, health, and quality of life. Understanding the difference is key to early intervention, support, and prevention.

## What Is Stress?

Stress is a normal response to demands or pressures — deadlines, responsibilities, or big life events. In small doses, stress can be motivating.

Signs of Stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or anxious
- Trouble sleeping or concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Irritability or restlessness
- Increased heart rate

✓ Stress is usually short-term and resolves once the situation is under control.

## What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by prolonged or repeated stress — especially in work or caregiving roles.

Signs of Burnout:

- Feeling drained, detached, or emotionally numb
- Reduced performance and productivity
- Cynicism, negativity, or loss of motivation
- Difficulty getting started or caring about tasks
- Feeling helpless, stuck, or disconnected

⚠ Burnout doesn't go away on its own and often requires time, support, and lifestyle adjustments.

## What You Can Do

If You're Stressed:

- Take short breaks throughout the day
- Practice breathing, stretching, or mindfulness
- Reframe your workload or priorities
- Get regular exercise and quality sleep

If You're Burned Out:

- Set clear boundaries — say “no” when needed
- Take extended time off, if possible
- Speak with a supervisor, HR, or a mental health professional
- Reconnect with meaning and purpose outside of work

**For more information on stress vs burnout, visit:**  
**[counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/stress-vs-anxiety-vs-burnout-whats-the-difference](https://counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/stress-vs-anxiety-vs-burnout-whats-the-difference)**



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