

WOMEN OF STEEL COMMITTEE SPECIAL PUBLICATION #1 BURNOUT, ANXIETY, STRESS AND DEPRESSION

Generally, members are aware of what **depression, anxiety** and **stress** are. However, workers may not be aware of what **burnout** is. The Women of Steel are releasing four publications raising awareness around some common mental health issues, with a focus on burnout which could be affecting members.

Publication #1 reviews general information, #2 is on self-help, #3 explores how burnout could affect you at work, and #4 is what to do when self-help is no longer working. These have been adapted with permission from the [original publications produced by Local 1944](#).

Burnout is a sign that something needs to change.



WATCH THE GLOBAL NEWS VIDEOS

Video #1 is on how to recognize the symptoms of burnout

Video #2 is on how to identify the signs of depression or anxiety

A GENERAL DEFINITION OF BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. Because of its many consequences, it's important to deal with burnout right away.

A GENERAL DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE BURNOUT

O.C. Tanner, an independent employee culture and engagement company, defines **workplace burnout** as: "A term once reserved for healthcare workers who put in too many hours in high-stress jobs, 'employee burnout' has now extended across industries and applies to all types of workers. Recently, the World Health Organization officially classified burnout as a syndrome related to 'chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.' Our research found 40% of employees are experiencing moderate-to-severe burnout. 95% of HR leaders admit burnout is hurting retention at their organizations, contributing to up to one-half of annual workforce turnover." (Read the [full report](#))

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes... Including you. We often advise our customers to reboot, why don't you?



RECOGNIZE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The majority of employees experiencing burnout will remain at work. Being aware of changes in attitudes and energy can help with early identification. Employees may not realize that they are dealing with burnout and may instead believe that they are just struggling to keep up during stressful times. Stress however, is usually experienced as feeling anxious and having a sense of urgency while burnout is more commonly experienced as helplessness, hopelessness, or apathy.

Employees may not be aware of the negative impacts on their performance that this can have, such as increased errors or lower productivity. Employers and co-workers may attribute the changes to a poor attitude or loss of motivation. The negative effects of burnout can increase significantly before anyone recognizes or addresses the problem and unaddressed burnout can increase the chance of developing clinical depression or other serious conditions.

Some of the **signs and symptoms** that an employee experiencing burnout may exhibit include: Reduced efficiency and energy; Lowered levels of motivation; Increased errors; Fatigue; Headaches; Irritability; Increased frustration; Suspiciousness; More time spent working with less being accomplished.

Severe burnout can also result in self-medication with alcohol and other substances; Sarcasm and negativity; Debilitating self-doubt.

Unaddressed burnout may result in a number of outcomes including: Poor physical health; Clinical depression; Reduced job satisfaction; Decreased productivity; Increased absenteeism; Increased risk of accidents; Poor workplace morale; Communication breakdown; Increased turnover.

For more information click [here](#).

THE LIES WE TELL OURSELVES

Some employees who have recovered from burnout shared what they called “the lies we told ourselves” related to denying the signs of burnout, even when loved ones pointed it out to them. These included:

- I am fine.
- It is your nagging at me that is stressful.
- I love my job.
- I am happy to take more on.
- I am just tired.
- You don't understand, no one else can do this.
- People are depending on me.
- I really want to be helpful.
- I will be fine once this is done.
- This too will pass.
- I need to get back to the top of my game.
- I'll take a vacation and then be okay.
- If people just let me do my job, I would be fine.
- It's not me, it is everyone and everything else.

Most actually believed these statements to be true and to a certain extent, many of them were. The “lie” was in denying that their current situation was damaging their health and well-being and that changes were necessary. This denial eventually led to burnout.

HOW IS BURNOUT DIAGNOSED?

There are no well-studied methods with which to diagnose burnout. There are various questionnaires for self-assessment, but because there is no generally accepted definition of burnout, it isn't clear whether questionnaires can actually “measure” burnout and distinguish it from other illnesses.

The most common questionnaire is the “Maslach Burnout Inventory” (MBI), which is available for different professional groups. But this questionnaire was originally developed for research purposes, not for use by doctors.

Online questionnaires on the risk of burnout are not suitable for determining whether someone has burnout or whether the symptoms are caused by something else.

The symptoms that are said to be a result of burnout can generally also have other causes, including mental or psychosomatic illnesses like [depression](#), anxiety disorders or chronic [fatigue](#) syndrome. But physical illnesses or certain medications can cause symptoms such as exhaustion and tiredness too. So it is important to consider other possible causes together with a doctor, and not to conclude you have burnout straight away. Because then you might risk starting treatments that don't help.

If self-help (see [Publication #2](#)) is no longer working, depending on the root cause of illness determined by a medical professional, if you are not able to work, a proper diagnosis is needed to determine if your illness is occupational, or non-occupational. If the illness is occupational, time loss from work would fall under Workers Compensation, as opposed to non-occupational illness which would fall under short term/long term disability (STD/LTD) plan by your employer (see [Publication #4](#)).

WHAT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH LOOKS LIKE

Good mental health might look different from one person to another. But there are six common factors of well-being that we see across different descriptions and definitions from across Canada and around the world. Good mental health includes: A sense of purpose; Strong relationships; Feeling connected to others; Having a good sense of self; Coping with stress; Enjoying life.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a normal human emotion. But, if it occurs too often or is severe, it can affect your quality of life. In those situations, we often describe anxiety as a ‘disorder’. There are several types of anxiety disorders and people often have symptoms of more than one type. Learn more about anxiety [here](#).

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Sadness is a normal human emotion. But, if it happens too often or becomes severe, we often describe the person as having a ‘depressive disorder’ or ‘depression’. Because depression affects motivation, energy levels and self-esteem, recovery from depression can be hard work. But the good news is that most people can successfully learn to manage their symptoms, regardless of age. Learn more about depression [here](#).

Use the ‘[Take a Test tool](#)’ to check your levels of stress, anxiety, or sadness. It is fully automated and anonymous – your responses are not checked nor monitored. This tool is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice and is not a clinically diagnostic tool.

RESOURCES

Identify

- What is burnout? A scientific [definition](#)
- An exhaustive [definition](#) of Occupational burnout
- National and Provincial [organizations](#) for mood and anxiety
- Learn more about the many [symptoms](#) of depression
- [U of T Resilience and Burnout Prevention Tip Sheet](#)

- [Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada](#) provides information on anxiety-related disorders, links to provincial resources and organizations
- [A Burnout Toolkit](#) can be accessed on [LifeWorks](#). U of T staff can email wellnesshub@utoronto.ca for an invite code for access to more resources.

Assess and Self-Test

- Here is a [list of anonymous self-test sites](#) on anxiety, PTSD, stress
- Find out about your own personal balance with the [Work/Life Balance Quiz](#)

*At any time if you need help, please reach out to the [Union](#). These communication pieces have been created in the spirit of education and empowerment.
In Solidarity,*

*Women of Steel
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