EMPOWER & THRIVE COUNSELING

Understanding Burnout & Chronic Stress

A practical guide, self-assessment, and recovery planning worksheet

Burnout is more than having a difficult week. It can develop when ongoing demands exceed your available time, energy, resources, or support. It is not a personal failure.

Stress, chronic stress, and burnout

Stress is a response to demands or perceived threats. Chronic stress means that stress persists over time. Burnout is often used to describe exhaustion, detachment, and reduced effectiveness associated with prolonged stress, particularly in work or caregiving roles.

Possible signs to notice

- Emotional: irritability, overwhelm, dread, numbness, reduced enjoyment, feeling disconnected.
- Physical: fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, sleep changes, digestive discomfort.
- Cognitive: trouble concentrating, forgetfulness, indecision, feeling mentally drained.
- Behavioral: withdrawing, procrastinating, working longer with less recovery, neglecting personal needs.

Important: These experiences can also occur with depression, anxiety, sleep problems, or medical conditions. A guide cannot diagnose burnout or determine its cause.

What can help?

- Reduce or redistribute demands where possible; not every stressor can be solved with better coping.
- Protect small, realistic recovery periods and basic needs such as food, hydration, sleep, and movement.
- Clarify expectations and boundaries; ask for practical support.
- Seek professional help if symptoms persist, worsen, or interfere with daily functioning.

Burnout Self-Assessment: a personal check-in

This is a reflection tool, not a validated screening test. Consider the past two weeks. For each statement, circle: Never / Sometimes / Often.

- I feel emotionally or physically depleted by routine demands.
- I have difficulty mentally disconnecting from responsibilities.
- I feel less patient, engaged, or connected than I want to.
- My sleep, appetite, concentration, or energy has changed.
- I feel I have little control over my time or workload.
- I put off rest or support because there is always more to do.

What patterns stand out?

Which responsibilities are draining me the most?

_____

_____

What signs tell me I am approaching my limit?

_____

_____

Which expectations are flexible, and which are not?

_____

_____

There is no score or cutoff. Use your answers to notice patterns and identify where support or changes may be needed.

My Recovery & Boundaries Plan

Choose small steps that fit your circumstances. Recovery may also require changes to workload, caregiving responsibilities, or other external demands.

One demand I can reduce, delegate, or renegotiate:

_____

_____

One boundary I want to communicate (and to whom):

_____

_____

One realistic way I can recharge this week:

_____

_____

One person or resource I can ask for support:

_____

_____

How will I know this plan is helping?

_____

_____

When to reach out: If exhaustion, mood changes, or functioning difficulties continue, consider talking with a licensed mental health professional or medical provider. If you are in immediate danger, call 911; for emotional crisis support in the U.S., call or text 988.

A reminder: Rest matters, but you do not have to solve systemic or overwhelming demands through self-care alone.