

BEATING BURNOUT

Jean M. Woloshuk, Ed.D.
Extension Specialist
4-H Youth/Agriculture

Shirley C. Eagan, Ed.D.
Extension Specialist
Volunteer Leadership

Have you ever suffered from overwork, juggled demands, felt all used up? Most of us have experienced that "frazzled feeling" at least once in our lives. To be effective over time, it is important for us to take care of ourselves--to prevent "burnout."

The purposes of this program topic are to assist participants to:

1. recognize and become aware of the burnout syndrome;
2. recognize the symptoms of burnout; and
3. learn some techniques to prevent or recover from burnout.

INTRODUCTION

Let's talk about burnout. *Ask group to define burnout. Discuss.*

Webster defines burnout as "to use one's resources or energies to excess." Burnout is a state of fatigue and/or frustration brought on by an intense pursuit of a goal or devotion to a cause. When people strive too hard and too long to reach a goal, they burn out. Burnout can bring on a series of physical, emotional, or psychological problems.

"Burning the candle at both ends" is a quote we often hear about people. *Ask group to discuss what symptoms might lead to this quote. Ask*

them to describe other experiences or feelings that show burnout is present.

We can all relate to burnout. Remember, though, that people who do burn out are not bad. They simply have lost their perspective of what is really important in life. They may be striving too hard to reach a goal in one area of their life, such as in business or at school, and have let the other areas of their life (family, social, personal, etc.) flounder. They didn't heed the warning signals or symptoms of burnout because they thought things would get better soon. Usually, they don't! They exposed themselves to too much stress over too short a time and they simply burned out.

RECOGNIZING BURNOUT

Your work and personal habits affect the manner in which you approach a goal or cause. Some people operate at full speed ahead while others operate at a snail's pace. Either of these operating speeds over time can cause burnout.

Discuss some of the symptoms of burnout. How can we tell when we or someone else is close to burnout?

Ann McGee-Cooper, et al; in their book **You Don't Have to Go Home From Work Exhausted!**, relate that the symptoms of burnout can be minor after a few weeks of pushing too hard on a project or on projects without relief, or

they can be a major case of burnout after a few years of living out of balance. The symptoms can be in the "I don't wanna ..." syndrome or may be basically the "lack of" symptoms. For instance, symptoms may include a lack of:

- *energy
- *satisfaction
- *enthusiasm
- *interest
- *motivation
- *dreams for life
- *ideas
- *concentration
- *humor
- *permission to play
- *joy
- *self-confidence

If you have some of these, don't rush to a "burnout" doctor. It is common for everyone to experience some ills occasionally. Burnout victims have symptoms that are constant, growing, and pervasive throughout all aspects of their life.

Have participants take the Burnout Quiz in the participant leaflet. You may want to discuss one or two of the questions to show the participants that they are not alone in their problems. Help them to score the quiz. Be sure to stress that this is a fun way to begin to look at the pace we are going today. Tomorrow may be different.

Look again at the symptoms of burnout noted above. What might cause these symptoms? *Discuss some of the happenings in our lives that might bring on the symptoms of burnout. Some examples might include: illness of self or loved one, a new job, moving, a marriage, divorce, an accident, death, etc.*

Tips to Prevent or Recover from Burnout

Once we recognize the symptoms of burnout it is important to take corrective steps to stop the course of action. The habits that bring on burnout are no harder or easier to change than any other habit. It requires self-discipline. The first step is to be honest with yourself and admit

that you are a burnout case or about to become one.

Look again at the causes of burnout noted above. *Discuss some of the solutions with the group. Perhaps you will want to jot the ideas or the following discussion points on a large sheet of paper.*

The following steps might help you prevent or recover from burnout. *Discuss the following with the group. Perhaps they can relate some personal anecdotes regarding these ideas.*

1. **Limit the number of hours you work.** Some burnout victims work excessively long hours (whether it's on personal, professional, or volunteer commitments). You may need to reduce your workload one hour per week, each and every week until you're down to a manageable time period. Using good time management techniques will be a valuable resource.
2. **Set goals and write them down.** Don't get bogged down in trivial details. Have a written goal and action plan. Prioritize your list. Break the job into many little tasks. Use a "to do" list and start with the most important task first.
3. **Learn to say "NO."** The ability to say "no" permits you to exercise control over your life so you can spend time productively on the activities most meaningful to you.
4. **Learn to delegate.** Resist the inability and unwillingness to ask others to assist with tasks. Delegating helps you get these tasks done. You do not need to do everything yourself. When delegating be certain to inform others of the exact task, time limits, and resources.

5. **Exercise.** One of the most effective ways to relieve tension and stress is through exercise. It not only helps you avoid a burnout episode, it also helps you avoid many physical ailments. Taking time to exercise usually makes you feel less tired and increases your level of awareness and productivity.
 6. **Break your routines.** Allow some flexibility in your daily schedule. Don't plan to do too much in any one day. Unforeseen events do crop up; allow for them. Don't be forced to play "Beat the Clock." Take your time and enjoy life.
 7. **Relax.** Take a break every so often during the day. Let your mind wander, not thinking about anything in particular. Don't let anything interfere with this time, especially the worry about what you are NOT doing.
 8. **Get away from your work.** Eat lunch away from the workplace. Walk to a park, exercise, or do something different. This is a way to relax and cleanse your mind.
 9. **Take vacations.** Vacation to relax not simply to do the same work in another environment.
 10. **Spend more time with your family and friends.** Get to know the people who are very important to you.
 11. **Take time for yourself.** Become "responsibly selfish!" Get away by yourself. Spend some time alone getting to know yourself. Meditate, relax, read light material, or pursue a hobby that is relaxing and enjoyable. Treat yourself--you deserve it!
 12. **Get plenty of rest.** The lack or loss of sleep can reduce your ability to throw off things and therefore reduce your ability to deal with the stressors that cause burnout. Get the amount of rest which is best for you.
 13. **Use medications cautiously.** Drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes only mask stress symptoms; they do not handle the causes of stress and burnout. Be sure to use only those medications which your physician has prescribed for you.
 14. **Don't take life too seriously--laugh and use humor.** Believe it or not you're not indispensable. Everything will go on with or without you. Let up on yourself and others. Enjoy all the aspects of your life.
- You may want to try these additional tips to relieve some stress and tension in your life.
- 2-5 Minute Breaks
1. Read the comics or your favorite columnist in the paper.
 2. Listen to a favorite song with a tape recorder and headphones.
 3. Plan something enjoyable for the evening or weekend.
 4. Call a friend and plan a lunch date.
 5. Take a walk around the office or around the block.
- 5-30 Minute Breaks
1. Listen to some inspiring or career development ideas from a seminar cassette tape.
 2. Plan extra walking into your day--park a brisk walk away from the entrance to the mall or grocery store.

3. Read an article in a favorite magazine.
4. Stop by a bookstore and browse.
5. Have a collection of activities, hobbies, etc. that you can easily pick up and put down, such as whittling, needlework, weaving, puzzles, etc.

Remember, the paradox of burnout prevention is that greater control will give you greater freedom to do the things you want to do. Plan your fun as thoughtfully and as frequently as you plan your work.

Ask members to decide on one tip they are going to try immediately. Get them to identify the goal out loud. It is hoped this will make them want to accomplish it. Check at the next meeting to see how well they are doing on their goal. Help them set additional goals.

References:

Alessandra, Anthony J. "Burnout: How You Can Try So Hard to Succeed and Yet Fail." **Voluntary Action Leadership**, Summer/Fall, 1987.

McGee-Cooper, Ann; Trammell, Duane; and Lau, Barbara. **You Don't Have To Go Home From Work Exhausted!** New York: Bantam Books, 1992.

1993: 1M