

Stress and Burnout

Recognising overload before your body has to shout

Stress is the body's response to pressure. In short bursts it can help us act, but when demands continue without enough recovery, the system can become overloaded. Burnout is not a failure of motivation. It is a sign that what has been asked of you has exceeded the resources available for too long.

Your exhaustion is information. You are worthy of support before you reach breaking point.

Notice the early signals

Warning signs can include irritability, headaches, muscle tension, poor sleep, forgetfulness, tearfulness, dread, withdrawing, losing enjoyment or feeling emotionally flat. You may work harder while getting less done. Early signs are an invitation to adjust, not evidence that you should push through.

Complete a demand audit

Write down what is taking energy: paid work, caring, appointments, sensory strain, decision-making, conflict, travel and invisible emotional labour. Mark what must happen, what can be delayed, what can be simplified and what someone else could share. Removing one recurring demand may help more than adding another wellbeing task.

Rest must match the strain

Sleep matters, but not all exhaustion is solved by sleep. Social overload may need solitude; decision fatigue may need fewer choices; sensory overload may need quiet; emotional strain may need safe connection. Choose rest that reduces the type of load you are carrying. Rest does not need to be earned.

Boundaries protect capacity

A boundary can be a later deadline, fewer meetings, a written agenda, a protected lunch break or saying 'I cannot take that on this week.' Start with one repeatable boundary rather than changing everything at once. If work is contributing, ask about reasonable adjustments, occupational health or a staged return.

Recovery is gradual

Burnout recovery often includes stopping, stabilising and rebuilding. Keep plans smaller than your best-day capacity. Track what drains and restores you, and expect fluctuations. Speak with a GP or qualified professional if symptoms persist, affect functioning or could have a physical cause. Immediate safety concerns need urgent support.

A gentle reflection

What feels most important for me to remember from this resource? What is one small, realistic form of support I could offer myself today?

This resource offers general information and is not a diagnosis or a substitute for personalised medical or mental health care. If you are in immediate danger or unable to keep yourself safe, contact emergency services or an urgent crisis service where you live.