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# Bouncing Back From Burnout

Burnout is more common than we think. Regardless of its cause, it's best not to ignore it.

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TEXT BY

Elena Owyong

ILLUSTRATION BY

Mushroomhead



Every Sunday, 36-year-old public officer Harry (not his real name) dreads the start of a new work week.

Unfortunately, his agony goes beyond the Monday blues.

"I don't sleep well at night. When I'm in the office, I'm frequently distracted by thoughts such as: 'Why am I working so hard? Should I quit my job?'" he said. Despite feeling burnt out and depressed, Harry forces himself to power through as he believes that it is hard to find another job.

Harry's situation is not uncommon in Singapore. A study conducted by technology provider [Ceridian](#) showed that more than 9 in 10 employees in Singapore are suffering from burnout, with 36% of the respondents experiencing high levels of this syndrome.

## What Causes Burnout

Dr Aurora de Souza Watters, a Senior Researcher from the Civil Service College (CSC), shared that research indicates that burnout can be found in almost every sector and job.

"Anyone can be susceptible to burnout, what may be more important is the alignment between the individual and their work," she added.

This situation may be exacerbated by employees working remotely during the pandemic as the lines between work and personal life begin to blur.

Ms Sabrina Lim, an Assistant Director from the Human Resources and Organisation Development Division at the Health Promotion Board, said that many officers stepped forward to help with the COVID-19 response efforts, learning to adapt to the dynamic situation while they safeguarded the public's health.

Sabrina, who is also a Wellness Ambassador, added: "When you consider this together with the disruptions that COVID-19 had on our personal lives, such as navigating hybrid work while caring for our family members, it's safe to say that many public officers might have experienced various levels of stress, as well as physical and mental fatigue and burnout over the last two years."

As a Wellness Ambassador, Sabrina forms part of a 900-strong community of public officers who are trained to provide basic mental and emotional support for their co-workers.

Experts have also found that individuals whose self-worth is closely tied to their work performances are more likely to suffer from job-related stress. Such individuals typically have "Type A" personalities: achievement-oriented, highly competitive and impatient.

In 2019, the World Health Organization recognised burnout in its International Classification of Diseases and attributed the cause to "chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed".

## What Burnout Feels Like

People who are burnt out may have trouble sleeping and feel tired all the time. Some people also experience headaches and body pain.

Over time, they may also lose interest in activities that they previously enjoyed. At work, burnout may result in lower productivity and motivation, as well as increased absenteeism since employees fall sick more easily.

Since burnout is a result of chronic stress, the stress hormone cortisol is produced, which increases one's likelihood of developing depression and other physical conditions like cancer, digestive problems, heart disease and sleep disorders.



## What Can You Do About It?

According to research compiled by the CSC, it takes an average of six months for one to feel the full extent of burnout and the process of recovery can be as long as two years.

If you are feeling the signs of burnout above, it's time to take it seriously. Here's what you can do:

### 1. Identify and Manage Your Stressors

Before you can tackle your symptoms, it is important to figure out what is causing them. Perhaps you have taken on too much unnecessary work? Have you been given unreasonable deadlines or KPIs to hit?

Once you have identified the trigger, it's time to tackle it head-on. For instance, start delegating some tasks or negotiating for more achievable deadlines and KPIs with your superiors. Schedule regular conversations with your supervisor to help you prioritise tasks and manage your workload.

With some of these stressors removed, it will give you some room to breathe.

### 2. Recharge With Baby Steps

Let's face it: Your symptoms of burnout aren't going to go away immediately. But you can start small. Find ways to do what you are good at to relieve the unhappiness at work. For instance, volunteer for roles that interest you or a project that excites you.

At the same time, remember to take breaks throughout the day. Research shows that taking microbreaks – one as short as 27 seconds is enough to lower stress levels and increase productivity. During these breaks, do some light stretching at your desk.

### 3. Tap Available Resources

Mindline is a website with mental health resources to support individuals' mental wellbeing in one's personal and professional lives. The resources, including a 24/7 chatbot, are provided and approved by the Ministry of Health's



Office for Healthcare Transformation, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the National Council of Social Service and the Institute of Mental Health.

Other free resources include the Health Promotion Board's [MindSG](#) and the Whole-of-Government Counselling Hotline.

Many CSC virtual courses are available for you to learn how to [manage your own wellbeing](#) and that of your team:

- Self-care: [Enhancing Your Personal Wellbeing through Self-Care](#)
- Peer Support: [Safeguarding Our Mental Health Through Peer Support](#)
- Managing teams: [Supporting Mental Well-being for a Thriving Workplace \(for Supervisors\)](#)

## 4. Find Community

Everyone plays a part in building a supportive workplace culture. Navigating work-life and all its ups-and-downs is easier when done alongside others who face similar challenges. Find or [create a community](#) to walk the journey together.

Public officers can also approach their organisation's Wellness Ambassadors for advice.

Sabrina said: "You don't need to have a problem to approach the ambassadors. Our role is to give you a safe space, listen deeply, and just be a friend. If you need additional help like counselling, there are other resources that we can tap on."

Sometimes, your symptoms may persist despite your best efforts to reduce stress. If you are still struggling, do approach a counsellor or psychologist for professional help.



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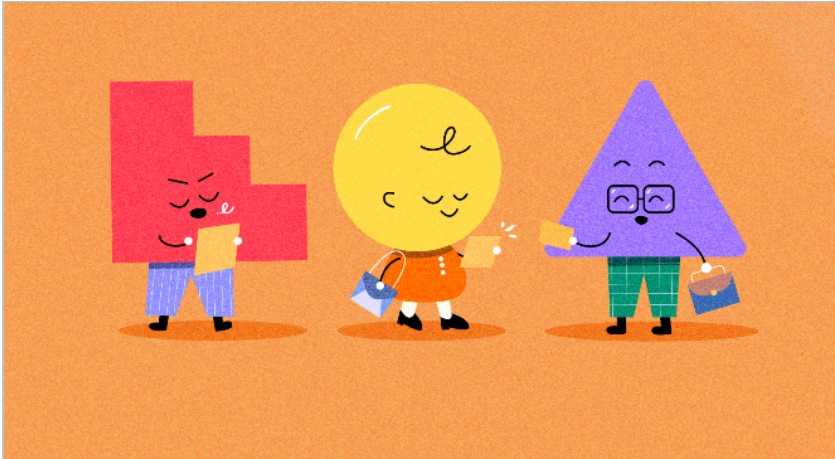




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