

Exhaustion syndrome (burnout)



Burnout denotes a state of exhaustion generally preceded by a prolonged period of greatly increased tension and highly elevated work demands with an associated increase in stress.



Dr. med. Barbara Hochstrasser, M.P.H.
Chief consultant

Characteristics

- Emotional exhaustion
- Physical exhaustion
- Reduced resilience
- Emotional lability
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Cynicism and lack of motivation
- Negative attitudes towards clients
- Feelings of reduced personal effectiveness

Causes

Burnout can have a variety of causes. Specific work situations as well as individual attitudes and behaviour patterns can be important causal factors in its development. Periods of intense stress may be followed by a prolonged state of exhaustion whereby even long recovery phases do not improve the individual's mental state.

Treatment

The first treatment phase is primarily devoted to diagnostics: a thorough psychiatric assessment is complemented by the evaluation of the somatic medical status including laboratory analysis, as well as assessment of physical fitness and vegetative tonus. The objectives of the treatment and the treatment plan are developed together with the patient.

The second treatment phase is devoted to intensively working through the individual problem areas and employing the different elements of the treatment programme. This includes:

- Psychiatric-psychotherapeutic individual therapy
- Group psychotherapy
- Traditional Chinese medicine
- Body-oriented therapies
- Relaxation therapies
- Riding therapy
- Fitness training, wellbeing and experiential therapies

- Analysis of the patient's work situation and support in discussions with the patient's employer
- If required: psychopharmacotherapy, physiotherapy, neural therapy, social support

In the third treatment phase, the individual prepares for the return to daily life in the private and professional contexts. The focus is on the sustainable integration into daily life of learned strategies for stress management, for maintaining a healthy lifestyle and work-life balance and for effectively managing professional tasks.

The duration of treatment is agreed in discussion with the individual patient and is usually between seven to ten weeks. Regular assessment of the treatment process takes the form of progress checks in which the next steps are planned.

Prevention strategies

To prevent burnout it is important to allow the body and soul to relax and regenerate. Enough sleep, a healthy and balanced diet and daily physical activity all provide a good basis. Maintaining personal relationships and engaging in leisure activities and hobbies are also crucial to well-being. Persons under prolonged work stress, with unclear work roles or constant pressure to deliver to tight deadlines should seek either internal or external support and advice.