

# ACORN <sup>↑</sup>update

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## TIRED AND FRAZZLED? BURNED OUT?

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More and more often, when I ask a client, "How are you today?" the answer is: "Exhausted" or "Tired" or "Beat." Often I don't even need to ask—the tiredness is visible in a haggard expression, or in dark circles under the eyes.

What is happening these days that is putting "burned out" expressions on so many faces? At least two factors seem particularly important for working people: the pressures at work for increasing productivity including overtime hours, and the increasingly high cost of living. More and more of the people I talk with are putting in overtime hours in order to "turn out" the expected level of production. Many others are now working two jobs—moonlighting has become a necessity as costs of everything continue to mount. And in addition to these pressures, many of us have family and parenting responsibilities as well.

As the pressures begin to take their toll on the individual, signs of what has recently been called "burnout" appears. In the first phase, there is emotional exhaustion—a feeling of being drained, used up, and of having nothing more to give. As one psychologist who counsels corporate clients has said, "Burnout involves losing the zest for living every day to the fullest."

Burnout in its advanced form does not happen overnight. Rather, it is the final stage of physical and/or mental depletion that results from excessive demands which have been made on an individual's time and energy.

Have you begun to experience the advance warning signs of burnout? Are you feeling, more and more often, "drained, used up, and having nothing more to give?" If so, what can you do about it?

First of all, stop and think about what you will do if the body and mind that you have falls apart. It's the only one you've got! So...what are you doing to keep it in good running order, so it will serve you well over the long haul?

As mentioned above, the affects of pressure and stress on the body and mind are cumulative. " Gradually one's coping abilities are undermined by prolonged stress and a failure to take "time outs" on a regular basis: to exercise, relax, and recharge one's batteries.

So how is one to do this? How can one find time to relax when there doesn't seem to be time to get all the "have to's" done? I am often struck by how people will schedule their lives to the hilt, and then say that there's just "no time to relax." To which my rejoinder often is, "Well, how about *scheduling* some time to relax?!"

Here are some other suggestions for avoiding burnout and making some form of exercise and relaxation a regular part of your life!

1. Think about what kind of exercise or sport you most enjoy, or would like to improve at, such as jogging, skiing, racquet ball, aerobic dancing, etc. Talk to people you know who participate in your chosen activity, and *schedule* a time to do it with someone. Unless you schedule it, it probably won't happen.

2. Walking and jogging are perhaps the easiest of such activities to engage in, because you don't have to have a partner, and they can be done on the spur of the moment. Even if its very cold outside, you can bundle up a bit and go out for a walk or jog before or after work. It will relieve stress, clear your head of some of the day's tensions, and you'll probably sleep better as well.

3. If you are having trouble relaxing and are plagued by tension, make a plan to learn a form of relaxation that you can use on a daily and as needed basis. Such techniques include meditation, deep breathing, and self-hypnosis, and can be learned from popular books, adult education courses, or by consulting an ACORN clinician. One of the

simplest and most effective techniques is to concentrate on your breathing for several minutes at those times when you are feeling uptight.

4. If family or parenting responsibilities interfere with your attempts to make some regular relaxation time for yourself, think about asking friend, other relatives, or a babysitter to take over your duties for several hours, a couple of times a week. Then use this time for a form of relaxation that will help you regain your composure and sense of well-being.