

Three Stages of Burnout:

From the Continuing Medical Education website of the Texas Medical Association
<http://www.texmed.org/cme/phn/psb/burnout.asp>

As defined by Girdin, Everly, & Dusek (1996), burnout is "a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress." (Note that research studies suggest that two of the major causes of burnout are bureaucratic atmospheres and overwork.) (Girdin, D.A., Everly, G.S. and Dusek, D.E., Controlling Stress and Tension, Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, MA, 1996)

Stage 1. Stress Arousal
Stage 2 . Energy Conservation
Stage 3. Exhaustion

****Stage 1: Stress Arousal** (Includes any two of the following symptoms)

1. Persistent irritability
2. Persistent anxiety
3. Periods of high blood pressure
4. Bruxism (grinding your teeth at night)
5. Insomnia
6. Forgetfulness
7. Heart palpitations
8. Unusual heart rhythms (skipped beats)
9. Inability to concentrate
10. Headaches

****Stage 2: Energy Conservation** (Includes any two of the following)

1. Lateness for work
2. Procrastination
3. Needed three-day weekends
4. Decreased sexual desire
5. Persistent tiredness in the mornings
6. Turning work in late
7. Social withdrawal (from friends and/or family)
8. Cynical attitudes
9. Resentfulness
10. Increased coffee/tea/cola consumption
11. Increased alcohol consumption
12. Apathy

Again, any two of these symptoms may signal you're in Stage 2 of the burnout cycle.

****Stage 3: Exhaustion**(Includes any two of the following)

1. Chronic sadness or depression
2. Chronic stomach or bowel problems
3. Chronic mental fatigue
4. Chronic physical fatigue
5. Chronic headaches
6. The desire to "drop out" of society
7. The desire to move away from friends, work, and perhaps even family
8. Perhaps the desire to commit suicide

Again, any two of these symptoms may signal you're in Stage 3 of the burnout cycle.

These stages usually occur sequentially from Stage 1 to Stage 3, although the process can be stopped at any point. The exhaustion stage is where most people finally get a sense that something may be wrong. The symptoms include: chronic sadness or depression, chronic stomach or bowel problems, chronic mental fatigue, chronic physical fatigue, chronic headaches or migraines, the desire to "drop out" of society, the desire to get away from family, friends, and even recurrent suicidal ideation.

Like the previous two stages, any two of these symptoms can indicate Stage 3 burnout. Remember, burnout is a process that usually occurs sequentially, it progresses through stages thus giving you the opportunity to recognize symptoms and take the necessary steps to prevent it.