Burnout in one page

What it is

What is burnout?

Burnout is a syndrome caused by long-term work stress that has not been managed. The World Health Organization calls it an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition. That does not make it less real: it has been studied and measured for decades.

- Burnout comes from long-term work stress
- Burnout is not a medical condition, but it is real

The signs

What are the signs of burnout?

The three signs of burnout are exhaustion, pulling away from your job or feeling cynical about it, and feeling you no longer get anything done. They grow out of long-term work stress, and the word applies to work only, not to caring or study.

- Exhaustion is one of the three signs of burnout

Where to start

What do I tell my GP about burnout?

Tell your GP what you can no longer do, for how long, and what at work drives it. Expect questions about mood, sleep and worry: the GP looks for a condition they can name.

Treatment

How long are the waits, and can I shorten them?

No government agency measures how long you wait for a psychologist or psychiatrist, so there is no official figure. Three lawful steps can help: free services that need no referral, psychologist video or phone sessions that pay the same as in-room, and getting a specialist referral early, since its 12 months start at your first appointment.

Medication

I already take medicine: what do I tell my GP?

Tell your GP about every medicine you take, and no, do not change or stop a prescribed medicine on your own. Bring a written list of your medicines to the appointment. Stay with the doctor who prescribes it, and ask them before any change. If your GP refers you on, the referral lists your medicines, so the next clinician knows too.

- Tell your GP every medicine you take
- Bring a written list of your medicines

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who prescribes if burnout brings depression or poor sleep?

No Australian source we read names a medicine for burnout itself, so there is no burnout medicine whose PBS listing we can point to. Black Dog Institute lists only non-drug strategies for burnout. If depression, anxiety or poor sleep is found as well, each is treated as its own condition, with its own rules about who prescribes.

- No source we read names a medicine for burnout
- Black Dog lists only non-drug strategies

What it costs

What does it cost?

It depends on who you see and where you live. With a mental health treatment plan, Medicare helps pay for up to 10 individual and 10 group sessions each calendar year, but practitioners set their own fees, so you may pay a gap. Medicare Mental Health Centres are free and need no referral or plan.

- Costs vary by service and place
- A plan helps pay for some sessions

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

Navigation, not diagnosis: this site is general information and is not a substitute for professional advice. Written by Hai from published sources. No clinician has reviewed these pages.

From haihealth.au/blog/burnout, 31 October 2026