



CUMULATIVE STRESS OVERLOAD IN 2020



WHAT'S STRESSING EVERYONE OUT?

In today's climate there is certainly no shortage of stressors. The psychological impact of these public events — and the way it impacts all areas of our lives — cannot be overstated.

HOW DO WE KNOW WE'RE STRESSED?

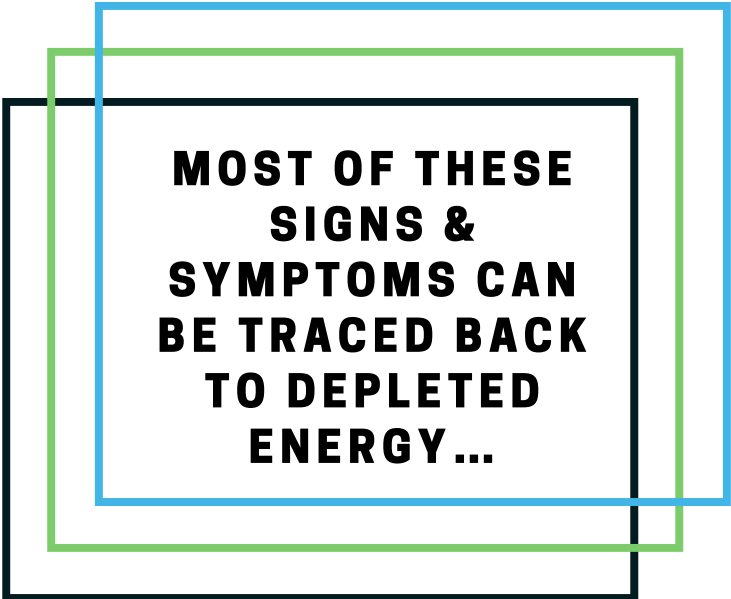
The effects of stress pose a serious concern to one's well-being. Before we go further, let's consider a few definitions:

- **Stress** is mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.
- **Burnout** is defined as the accumulation and total sum of stress that includes emotional exhaustion or withdrawal associated with increased workload or institutional stress.
- **Compassion Fatigue** is the emotional residue/strain of exposure to working with those suffering traumatic events. This type of fatigue can include physical symptoms, such as difficulty sleeping, and emotional symptoms, such as loss of self-worth or anger.

WHAT DOES STRESS LOOK LIKE?

Consider these possible signs & symptoms:

- *Isolation and withdrawal*
- *Being disengaged or unmotivated*
- *Physical exhaustion*
- *Nightmares and flashbacks*
- *Loss of empathy or compassion*
- *Relationship issues*
- *Substance misuse and abuse*
- *Recurrent sadness or depression*
- *Resistance to feedback*
- *Resistance to change*
- *Reduction in meaningful work product*
- *Reduced job satisfaction*



**MOST OF THESE
SIGNS &
SYMPTOMS CAN
BE TRACED BACK
TO DEPLETED
ENERGY...**

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HOW CAN SELF-CARE HELP?

A tangible approach to the devastating consequences of the current environment and the stress each person is experiencing is self-care for mental health.

First, let's consider what self-care even means? Self-care is not an exercise regimen or seeing a counselor (although it could encompass those things). Rather, it's a conscious process of considering our needs and seeking out activities and habits that replenish our energy—so that we can continue to move forward. This last part is often difficult to understand. We often lead ourselves to believe that we do our best when we commit all our resources to something, working ourselves harder and harder. But that's not always true.

We only have a finite amount of energy each day to expend, so it's important to consider how this relates to self-care. We must acknowledge that self-care is a perishable skill, just like driving, or maintaining our health. We must practice self-care in order to be successful in maintaining good mental health.

3 SELF-CARE TOOLS

1. Remember to also cultivate a life outside of work. Creating time for relationships and activities outside of the work environment is not always easy to do. It can be helpful to take a step back for yourself and family because it can be hard to let go of what we experience at work even when we are at home. You may at first need to schedule planned activities with family and friends. Otherwise, you may find that you spent yet another evening stewing over the day's events while your kids played games on their tablets in the other room. Also remember, that “alone time” is beneficial. Find activities— watching a TV show, playing a game with a family member or friend, taking a walk, calling a friend or loved one, swimming, reading, bird watching, listening to music—that you enjoy and make time for them, too.

2. Develop good physical health habits. It is also suggested that committing to a physical exercise strategy that you can maintain will support your emotional well-being. Consider whether you need to improve your diet, too. Without a conscious effort it can be difficult to make wise choices in the moment.

3. Practice mindfulness and meditation. Visualization, meditation and mindfulness could improve everyone's mental health. Visualization is a type of meditation about a specific activity or outcome and is widely used by professional athletes to focus on performance. Consider visualizing a way to connect with your community or family positively or visualizing internal peace. Meditation is focused on trying to empty one's mind of everything so that it can re-charge or clear the memory of negative thoughts.

If you are finding implementing these tools challenging, please contact your EAP to consult with a coach or counselor to create an action plan that will help you focus on your self-care, prioritizing your well-being in an environment that has made that challenging.

Final thought: **remember to be mindful of the things you can and cannot control.** You cannot control the reactions of others, only your own response, and that is where our power exists.



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