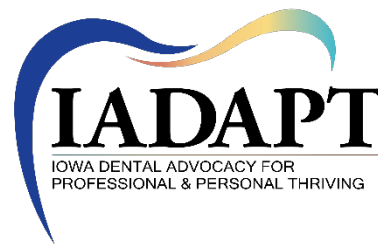


Stress Management Skills – Burnout Part 2



Occupational burnout is a work-related phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Symptoms overlap considerably with depression, but share biological underpinnings related to PTSD. Full-blown burnout can make it impossible for you to work, or threaten your safety. Our September article suggested you take a self-quiz to attend to your own risk, and focused on addressing the energy depletion and exhaustion symptoms of burnout by suggesting seven different types of restoration. Please go back and take the quiz if you haven't already!

Burnout almost always includes a depletion of physical resources. In our busyness, we often ignore our body's messages of headaches, GI problems, poor sleep, etc. We may notice difficulty recovering from physical exertion, even enjoyable activities. It is important at this stage to attend to physical health and any existing medical conditions, and to listen to what your body is telling you. Improve health behaviors now (diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management) to avoid future damage of untreated stress.

Emotionally, early and mid-stages of burnout include feeling overwhelmed much of the time, perhaps with a sense of dread upon arriving at work, irritability, and difficulty coping with daily demands that didn't used to feel so insurmountable. Talk therapy, taking time away from work, sharing your concerns with trusted others, and enlisting their help in your self-care, can help turn things around at this stage. The purpose of treatment at this stage is to prevent burnout from progressing or becoming a chronic condition.

As burnout progresses, feelings may start to include cynicism, apathy, numbness, and loss of empathy. Behavioral changes may include substance use increase, other "escapist" behaviors, isolation, hiding the symptoms from others, and reduced professional efficacy. This is serious burnout. It is difficult at this stage to just "get over it" without professional help. The goal of treatment at this stage is to prevent permanent impairment and to restore baseline health and functioning as much as possible.

The best-case scenario is to prevent burnout before it occurs. This is done by reducing the presence and impact of contributing factors in your practice, and by learning effective stress management strategies to use on a regular basis. The further "upstream" one is from the negative outcome of burnout, the more likely it is that the intervention will be effective. But no matter the severity of the symptoms, your brain and body can heal with attention and intervention.