



EVERYDAY CLINICAL

Depression vs Burnout: Know the Difference & Find the Solution

Winter's arrival brings shorter days, increased isolation, and the "winter blues." Depression and burnout are common at this time of year, but identifying them can be a challenge, because the shortened sunlight hours affect many people negatively; everyone seems to be too busy, spending too much money, or feeling too harried about the holidays, and most of us have stressful winter engagements.

Depression and burnout go beyond a simple case of the "winter blues." They are also distinct from one another in key ways.

Depression is marked by feelings of sadness, loss of interest in daily life, and hopelessness; some depressed people also feel angry and irritable. These feelings can be pervasive throughout all areas of life, including work and family, and if you experience these symptoms for more than a few days, you should consult your physician and initiate counseling or therapy with a licensed professional.

Burnout, on the other hand, tends to be directly related to your career and job. The symptoms may feel much the same as depression, but there is one key difference—burnout symptoms may diminish during weekends or vacations. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that results from over-

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whelming, prolonged stress, and rest and rejuvenation may provide relief. However, some people may experience more severe symptoms, and burnout left unchecked and untreated may evolve into depression. If you do not find relief during short periods of rest, you may need extended time away from work.

Address depression and burnout in the following ways to ease the symptoms:

- Seek professional help from a licensed psychologist or counselor who understands your experiences and will provide support and intervention strategies that will increase your positive feelings and alleviate your symptoms.
- Set boundaries that protect your leisure and personal time. Turn off cell phones, computers, and televisions. Avoid places where you have to be your professional self (eg, if everyone at the local diner saunters to your table for some quick advice, choose another location for breakfast).
- Take time off from work if you are experiencing moderate to severe symptoms. Financial stress may be a hindrance, but short breaks from work may benefit your career in the long run.
- Get enough sleep. Many symptoms are exacerbated by lack of sleep. Just



because you can “get by on 5 hours of sleep” does not mean that you function well on that amount.

- Unplug to further protect your leisure time. This includes all your electronics—phones, computers, televisions, and music players (except music or audiobooks). Personal stress is often compounded by world stresses, and removing external stimuli may allow for deeper relaxation. If you experience withdrawal and anxiety about being unplugged (ie, thinking, Yes, but ...), that may indicate that you need to unplug regularly.
- Engage in social activities. See a show, have dinner with friends, trek through the woods with your dog, or play games with your family. Spend time with people you enjoy and, especially if you are experiencing burnout, people with non-work-related common interests. If you often spend time with a colleague and his or her spouse but the conversations always veer toward work-related topics, either socialize with other friends or make a deal with your colleague to leave work at the office.

Depression and burnout have similar symptoms; burnout left untreated can readily develop into the more-pervasive depression. Seeking professional help is most important, because not only are licensed professionals trained to work with individuals struggling

with depression and/or burnout, but they also provide an external source of support.

In addition, taking small steps to take care of yourself will help alleviate your symptoms and increase your feelings of self-worth, value, happiness, and contentment.

Depression and burnout are challenging mental health concerns for many people, particularly in high-stress situations. Facing your symptoms directly and establishing boundaries that prioritize your well-being take courage. The bottom line: You can only be as good for others as you are for yourself.