

## Recharge the Doctor: Lifestyle Psychiatry Insights into Energy Depletion, Burnout, and Prevention among Physicians – A Global Survey

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how various lifestyle factors such as diet, caffeine consumption, and work practices like break frequency affect energy levels and burnout among doctors. By surveying 100 medical professionals across different specialties globally, the research aimed to uncover how these factors influence occupational well-being. The analysis revealed some correlations, suggesting that specific, targeted strategies could enhance the welfare and performance of doctors. The findings underscore the critical role of the work environment, adequate hydration, a balanced diet, and the necessity for short psychological breaks in bolstering overall well-being.

**Keywords:** Psychiatry; Physicians; Lifestyle

### INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle psychiatry refers to the integration of lifestyle factors—such as diet, exercise, sleep, and stress management into the prevention and treatment of mental health conditions. Burnout among healthcare professionals, particularly doctors, represents a profound challenge with far-reaching consequences.<sup>[1]</sup> The American Medical Association defines physician burnout as a chronic workplace stress response, characterized by symptoms such as depersonalization, mental exhaustion, and anhedonia.<sup>[2]</sup> Healthcare workers are disproportionately affected by the rigors of their job, leading to physical strain and emotional exhaustion, making them a high risk group for burnout.<sup>[3]</sup> This not only affects personal health of doctors but also the quality of patient care, leading to significant issues in the healthcare system.<sup>[4]</sup> Physician burnout manifests in various ways, including emotional exhaustion, reduced performance, and detachment.<sup>[5]</sup> The consequences

extend beyond personal well-being to impact patient safety and healthcare efficiency.<sup>[6]</sup> For instance, burnout is associated with higher rates of medical errors, such as prescription mistakes, which can compromise patient safety. Burnout often results in decreased patient satisfaction due to reduced physician engagement and quality of care.<sup>[7]</sup> Burnout contributes to high turnover rates and job dissatisfaction, potentially exacerbating shortages.<sup>[8]</sup> The Association of American Medical Colleges predicts a shortage of approximately 86,000 doctors in the United States by 2036. Similarly, a recent NHS England workforce plan warns that staff shortages in England could exceed 570,000 by 2036, encompassing doctors, nurses, GPs, and dentists.<sup>[9]</sup> In some regions, burnout-related mental health issues, including increased suicide rates among doctors, highlight the severity of the problem.<sup>[10]</sup> Long hours and high patient loads contribute to physical and mental exhaustion. The demanding nature of the job often leads to insufficient rest and personal time.<sup>[11]</sup> Constant exposure to high-stress situations can erode resilience and job satisfaction.<sup>[12]</sup> Excessive documentation and administrative tasks further strain physicians, detracting from patient care and increasing burnout risk.<sup>[13]</sup> Reduced independence in decision-making can lead to frustration and decreased job satisfaction.<sup>[14]</sup> Pervasive culture of toxic professionalism plagues the medical field, jeopardizing the well-being of physicians, medical trainees, and ultimately, patient care. This harmful culture can take many forms, including invasive scrutiny, lack of personal boundaries, hierarchical power dynamics that stifle collaboration and empathy, excessive workload and unrealistic performance expectation<sup>[15]</sup> The economic implications of physician burnout are unsustainable, driven by excessive turnover, substantial recruitment costs, and the potential for premature departure from clinical practice.<sup>[16]</sup> Limited time to see a high volume of patients contributes to poor patient satisfaction and physician exhaustion. Physician burnout also increases the chances of motor vehicle crashes<sup>[17]</sup> In-depth discussions with doctors worldwide have highlighted significant mental health challenges and the need for focused interventions. In an era of physician supply-demand imbalance, addressing, mitigating, and preventing burnout is crucial to safeguarding the healthcare system's most vital resource. This, in turn, can enhance patient care quality and safety.<sup>[18]</sup>

Lifestyle modifications can prove to be vital in handling the stress and reducing the burnout significantly.<sup>[19]</sup> Lifestyle factors such as nutrition, hydration, appropriate levels of caffeine consumption, short breaks, exercise play a crucial role in influencing energy levels and resilience against stress.<sup>[20]</sup> Balanced nutrition and regular exercise can enhance overall well-being and reduce burnout risk.<sup>[21]</sup> Adequate hydration is also important for better energy levels during and after work.<sup>[22]</sup> Drinking small amount of water regularly enhances both physical & mental wellbeing.<sup>[23]</sup> While caffeine can provide temporary energy, excessive intake may lead to increased stress and restlessness.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Aim

The primary aim of this study was to explore the impact of lifestyle factors on energy levels and burnout among doctors. A secondary aim was to identify effective strategies that could be integrated into the emerging field of lifestyle psychiatry, with a specific focus on supporting doctors.

## Methodology

### Survey Design

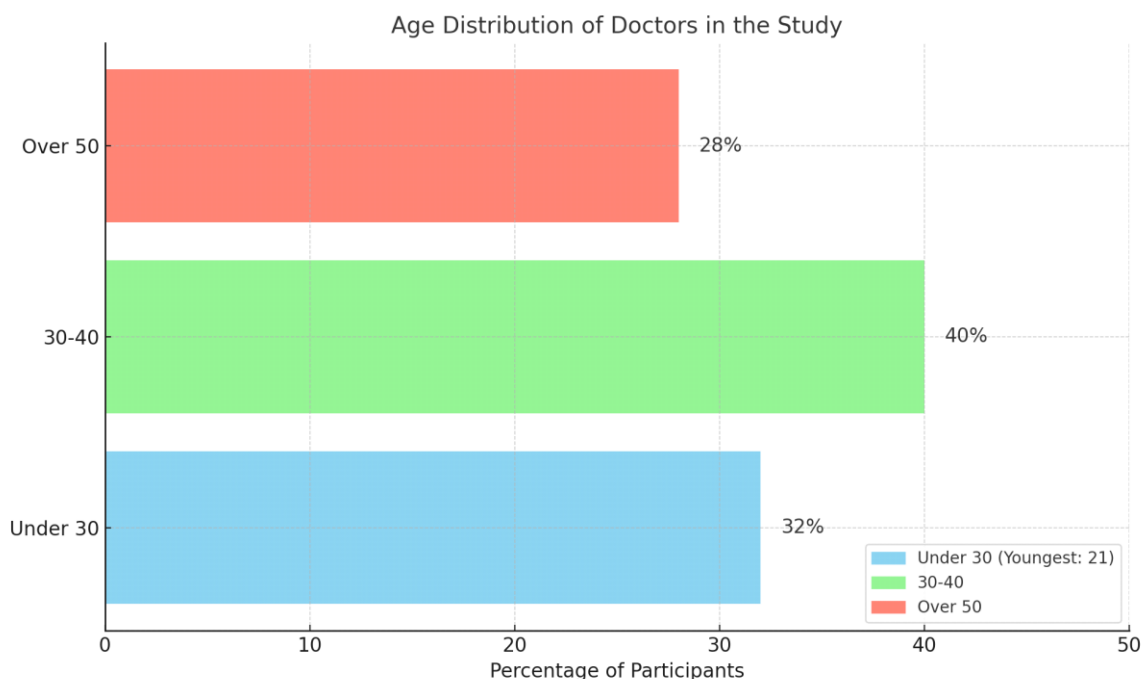
A structured questionnaire was developed to gather data on various aspects of doctors' lifestyles and work practices. The survey included questions covering the following areas:

- **Demographics:** Age, sex, medical specialty
- **Energy Levels:** Self-reported energy levels at the end of the workweek
- **Burnout:** Feelings of burnout experienced over the past month
- **Dietary Habits:** Types of diet followed and perceived impact on energy levels.
- **Caffeine Consumption:** Frequency and quantity of caffeine intake and its perceived effects
- **Exercise Habits:** Frequency and types of exercise routines.
- **Break Practices:** Frequency, duration, and activities during workday breaks.

The collected data aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these lifestyles and work-related factors influence doctors' energy levels and burnout.

### Participants

The study encompassed a total of 100 medical professionals drawn from various specialties, including general medicine, surgery, orthopedics, obstetrics, psychiatry, and emergency medicine. The participants represented a broad age spectrum, ranging from 21 to over 60 years. Approximately 40% of the doctors were within the 30–40 age bracket, 32% were under the age of 30 (with the youngest being 21), and around 28% were over 50 years old. This diverse age distribution facilitated a comprehensive analysis of lifestyle patterns and occupational practices, offering valuable insights into how these factors influence doctors across different stages of their professional careers. The figure below illustrates the statistical distribution of participants by age group in the form of a flow chart.



**Figure 1:** Statistical flow chart showing the age distribution of doctors who participated in the study.

### Data Collection

Responses were collected anonymously through an online survey platform, ensuring both confidentiality and ease of access for participants. The survey was open for one month through social media platforms, with weekly reminders sent to maximize participation rates. Each response was analysed individually, allowing for a detailed examination of the core factors affecting energy levels and burnout among doctors. This approach enabled the identification of key patterns and correlations, providing a foundation for targeted strategies to address the issues identified.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from 100 participants was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify general trends and patterns related to lifestyle behaviors and burnout among medical professionals. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize demographic variables (such as age, gender, and specialty) as well as responses regarding energy levels, physical activity, hydration, caffeine intake, dietary habits, and perceived burnout. The relationships between lifestyle factors and reported well-being were explored through visual analysis using bar charts and flow diagrams created in Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2018) to illustrate comparative distributions across categories. IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 26.0; IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) was used for data organization, tabulation, and generation of summary statistics.<sup>[25,26]</sup> Although no advanced inferential statistical tests were applied, basic cross-variable comparisons enabled the identification of key patterns, such as the negative association between regular exercise and burnout, and the observed links between hydration, caffeine consumption, and energy levels.<sup>[27]</sup>

## RESULTS

### Demographics

Among the 100 participants in the study:

#### Age Distribution:

- 32% were under 30 years old.
- 40% were aged 30-39.
- 28% were aged above 50.

This stratification highlights a balanced representation of both early-career and senior medical professionals, enabling a comprehensive understanding of age-related differences in lifestyle and occupational experiences.

#### Gender Split:

- 60.7% of the participants were male.
- 39.3% were female.

#### Specialties Represented:

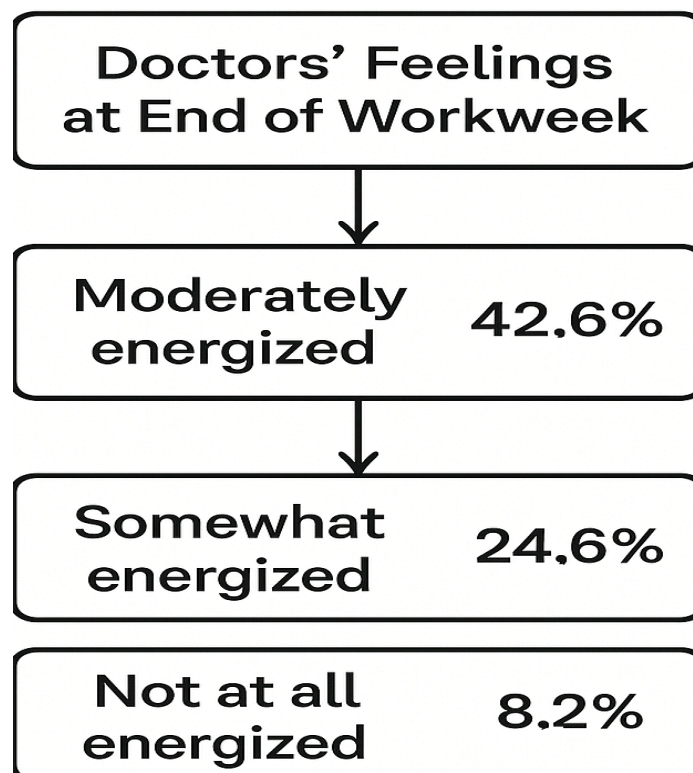
The participants came from a wide range of specialties, from general practice to highly specialized fields such as neurology, critical care orthopedics and psychiatry.

This diverse representation ensured a comprehensive understanding of how various factors impact doctors across different demographics and specialties, with participants primarily from both Western healthcare systems (UK, USA) and Eastern systems (Indian subcontinent).

### Key Findings

#### Energy at the End of the Week:

- Most doctors (42.6%) reported feeling "moderately energized" at the end of the workweek.
- 24.6% felt "somewhat energized," while 8.2% felt "not at all energized."
- A notable correlation was found between higher caffeine intake, lower water consumption, and reduced energy levels. Doctors who consumed more caffeine and less water exhibited significantly lower energy levels. This finding suggests the need for further research to explore the impact of hydration and caffeine consumption on energy.
- The flow chart diagram below represents energy at the end of the week.



Quantitative Assessment of Dietary and Hydration-Related Fatigue Determinants Among Medical Professionals During the Workweek graphical analysis is shown in **Figure 2** below.

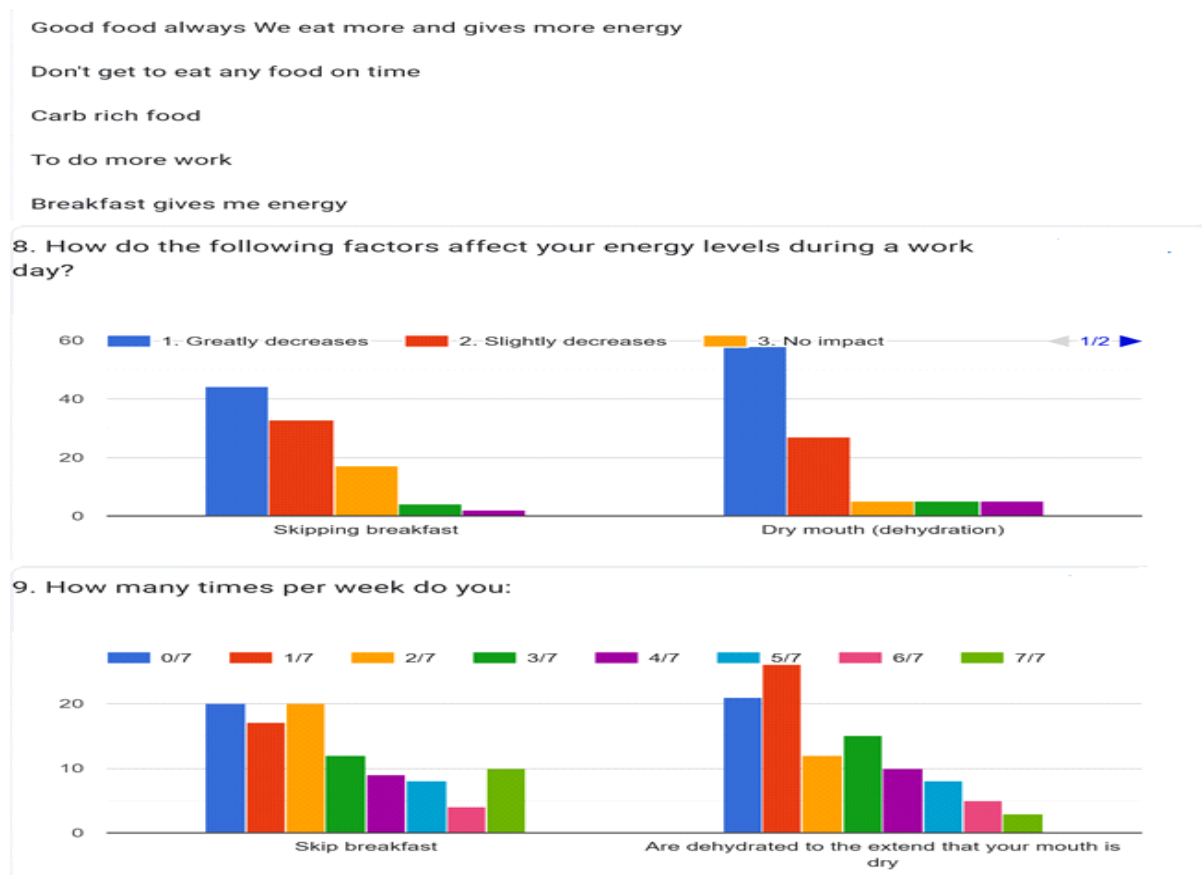


Figure 2

**Burnout Levels:**

- 31.1% of doctors reported feeling "somewhat burnt out."
- 19.7% indicated they were "fairly burnt out."

These findings highlight important areas for future investigation, particularly regarding the relationship between lifestyle habits and occupational well-being among doctors.

**Impact of Lifestyle Factors**

**Dietary Impact:**

- 34.4% of doctors acknowledged that their diet directly affected their energy levels.
- Many reported an improvement in energy when consuming balanced meals, while a noticeable decline in energy was associated with irregular eating patterns or unhealthy food choices.

These findings underscore the importance of dietary habits in managing energy levels among medical professionals, suggesting that a focus on balanced nutrition could be a key strategy for reducing burnout and maintaining optimal performance. Furthermore, chronic stress leads to change in eating habits which further increases risk of more burnouts.<sup>[28]</sup> Updated and evidence based dietary interventions to support mental wellbeing should be developed for physicians and other healthcare workers, Organisational reforms should be implemented to develop a culture of healthy eating within healthcare settings, promoting holistic wellbeing among physicians.<sup>[29]</sup>

**Pre-Shift Dehydration:** Research indicates that many workers, including physicians, often start their shifts already dehydrated. This pre-existing condition can be compounded by the physical demands of the job and the constraints imposed by PPE, making it difficult to maintain proper hydration throughout the shift.

**Fluid Loss During Physical Labor:**

For those engaged in physically demanding tasks or working in hot environments, the body's sweat production can quickly exceed fluid intake. The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including full or half-face masks and gowns, can impede fluid intake and exacerbate dehydration among healthcare professionals. PPE can make it cumbersome to drink fluids frequently, especially during extended shifts or high-intensity work. Without effective strategies to replenish fluids, this can lead to significant dehydration and depleted water reserves.

**Caffeine Influence**

**Caffeine Consumption:**

- A majority of doctors (59%) reported consuming one to two cups of caffeinated beverages daily, while 28% consumed three to four cups (Figure 2)
- The effects of caffeine varied among participants: 32% reported improved focus, 15% experienced increased anxiety, and 8% noted a subsequent energy crash. Additionally, 22% reported difficulty sleeping, while 23% stated that caffeine had no noticeable effect.

The impact of caffeine on energy and burnout levels appears to be more complex than traditionally assumed.<sup>[30]</sup> Excessive caffeine intake, especially when combined with inadequate water consumption, may contribute to low energy levels due to its effect on cortisol levels and the central nervous system.<sup>[31]</sup> Caffeine, even in moderate doses, may not lead to tolerance of cortisol levels; however, in a high-stress environment, chronic elevation of cortisol due to caffeine could have long-term health implications, including exacerbating burnout.<sup>[32]</sup> Further research is needed to explore the relationship between caffeine consumption, hydration, cortisol levels, and their combined effects on health and occupational well-being. Figure

**Caffeine Consumption Patterns and Cognitive Effects Among Medical Professionals: An Analytical Overview of Intake, Preferences, and Physiological Responses** statistical distribution is shown in **Figure 3** below.

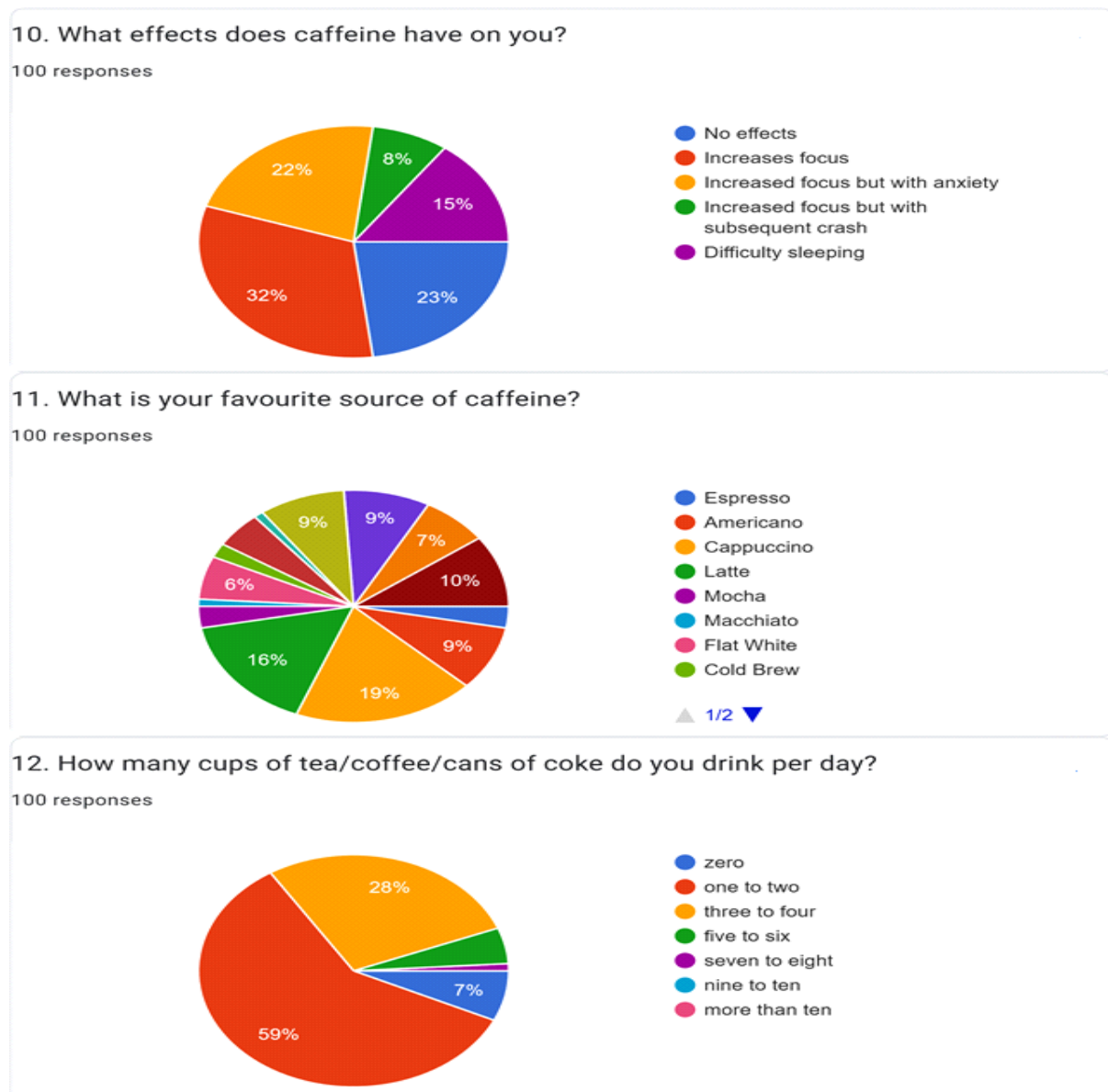


Figure 3

### Exercise and Well-being

#### Physical Activity:

- Approximately 42% of respondents reported engaging in regular physical exercise, which demonstrated a negative correlation with burnout levels. Physicians who exercised more frequently tended to report significantly lower levels of burnout, suggesting that physical activity may serve as a protective factor against occupational stress and emotional exhaustion.
- Regular exercise was linked to improved brain function, increased resilience to workload, and enhanced endurance against psychological stress.
- Additionally, those who exercised regularly were often better hydrated than their sedentary counterparts, both at work and outside of work.

Patterns of Physical Activity Among Medical Professionals: Frequency, Duration, and Preferred Forms of Exercise in Relation to Occupational Well-Being stastical distrubution is shown below in **Figure 4**

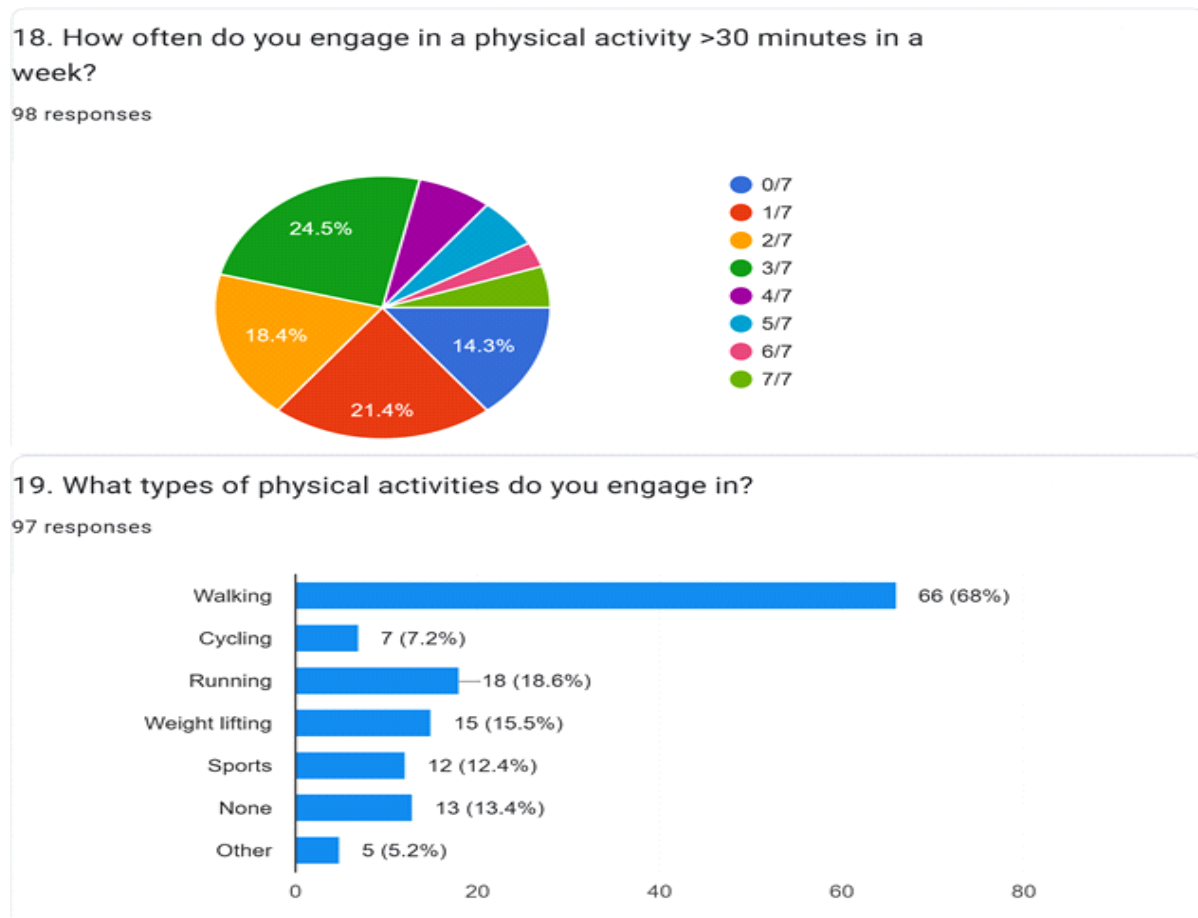


Figure 4

**Effectiveness of Exercise Against Burnout:**

- 28.8% of doctors found exercise to be "very effective" in combating burnout.
- Another 30.5% rated the effectiveness of exercise as "neutral."

These findings reinforce the importance of regular physical activity in reducing burnout. Exercise contributes not only to physical well-being but also to mental resilience and cognitive function.<sup>[33]</sup> The benefits of exercise are well-documented, including improved hydration, better stress management, and enhanced overall well-being.<sup>[34]</sup> Promoting regular physical activity could be a key strategy in mitigating burnout among healthcare professionals.

**Work Practices**

**Breaks During Work**

**Break Patterns:**

- A significant variation was observed in break patterns among the doctors. Those who took more frequent breaks (two or more during an 8-hour shift) reported higher energy levels and lower burnout rates.

**Activities During Breaks:**

- Engaging in refreshing activities during breaks, such as socializing with colleagues or taking short walks, was linked to reduced feelings of burnout and improved energy levels.

These findings suggest that incorporating more frequent and meaningful breaks during the workday can play a crucial role in managing energy levels and preventing burnout. Short breaks that include relaxing or engaging activities can help recharge mental and physical reserves, enhancing overall well-being and performance among healthcare professionals.

**Break Practices and Restorative Activities Among Medical Professionals: Frequency, Duration, and Behavioral Preferences During Work Shifts** statistical distribution is shown below in **Figure 5**

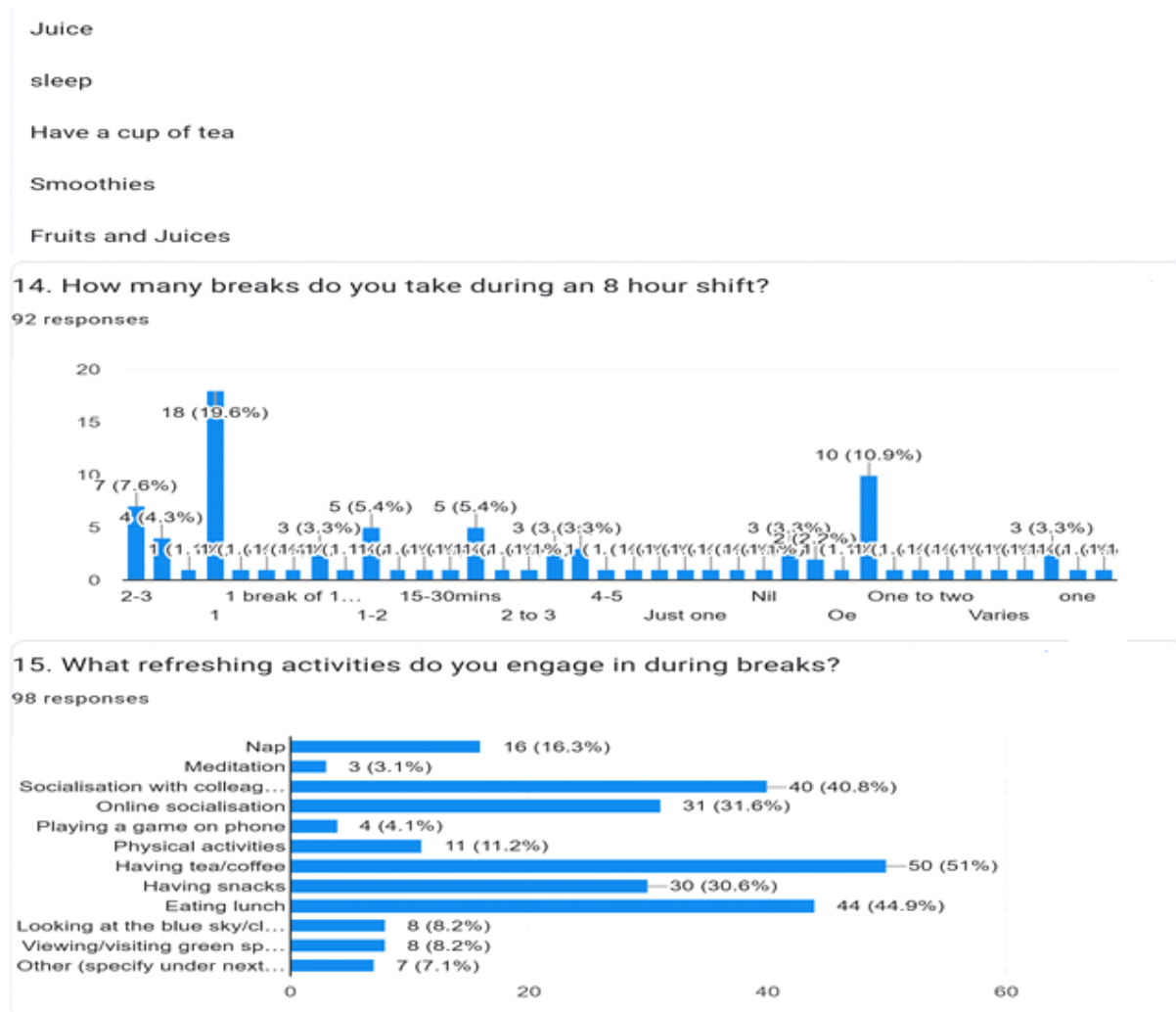


Figure 5

## DISCUSSION

### Key Findings and Implications

#### Alignment with Existing Literature

The data from our study align with existing research emphasizing the crucial role of lifestyle management in mitigating burnout among doctors.<sup>[35]</sup> Our findings reinforce the importance of several lifestyle factors in influencing doctors' energy levels and well-being.<sup>[36]</sup> This aligns with the principles of lifestyle psychiatry, an emerging field that emphasizes the role of behavioral and environmental factors—such as nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and stress management—in the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders:

**Regular Physical Activity:** Consistent exercise has been shown to improve physical health and reduce stress, contributing to overall well-being.

**Adequate Hydration:** Proper hydration is essential for maintaining cognitive and physical performance throughout the workday.<sup>[37]</sup>

**Structured Breaks:** Regular breaks, including engaging in non-work-related activities such as walking or socializing, offer crucial mental resets and help sustain energy levels during long shifts.

#### Impact of Lifestyle Interventions

The study suggests that targeted interventions focused on the following areas could substantially enhance doctors' professional well-being:

**Dietary Habits:** Improving dietary choices can boost energy levels and overall health.

**Mindful Caffeine Consumption:** Moderating caffeine intake to avoid excessive consumption can help manage stress and restlessness.

**Hydration policies** implementing institutional policies that encourage regular hydration breaks and facilitate easy access to fluids can help mitigate the risk of dehydration. Explore improvements in PPE design that allow for easier hydration without compromising safety or effectiveness. Educate healthcare professionals on the importance of hydration and practical strategies for maintaining fluid balance during shifts. Develop systems for monitoring hydration status and provide support for physicians who may be experiencing signs of dehydration. By addressing these hydration challenges and implementing effective strategies, healthcare institutions can support better cognitive functioning and decision-making among physicians, ultimately improving both their well-being and patient care outcomes.<sup>[38]</sup>

**Physical Activities:** Promoting regular exercise can alleviate physical and mental stress, contributing to better resilience against burnout.

#### Addressing Toxic Professional Culture

Collaborative efforts among government agencies, healthcare organizations, and leaders are essential to transform the healthcare system, fostering a more sustainable environment for physicians and patients.<sup>[39]</sup> Advocate for institutional changes, such as reduced administrative burdens and improved work-life balance. Encourage practices that enhance physical and mental well-being, including nutrition, exercise, and stress management techniques. Enhance physicians' ability to make independent decisions and reduce bureaucratic

constraints.<sup>[40]</sup>

### Limitations

**Self-Reported Data:** Reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias and affect the reliability of findings.

**Size Sample:** The relatively small sample size may limit the applicability of results to the broader physician population.

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of lifestyle behaviors and work practices on the energy levels and burnout experienced by doctors. The findings demonstrate that factors such as hydration, balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, and structured breaks during work shifts play a crucial role in supporting occupational well-being. While the analysis does not establish causality, the observed associations suggest that implementing targeted lifestyle interventions and promoting a supportive work environment may help mitigate burnout and enhance overall performance. As healthcare professionals continue to face demanding work conditions, prioritizing holistic wellness strategies is essential not only for individual resilience but also for sustaining quality patient care. Future research involving larger and more diverse cohorts, along with objective health measures, will be critical to validate these insights and inform policy and institutional reforms.

### Future Directions

Continued research is essential to comprehensively evaluate the long-term effects of lifestyle interventions on physician wellness. To enhance the validity and applicability of findings, future studies should include larger and more demographically diverse cohorts, allowing for a more accurate understanding of how interventions perform across various healthcare populations and settings. The integration of objective measures such as biometrics, validated burnout scales, and physiological indicators can further improve the precision of assessments, enabling the development of more effective strategies. In addition to lifestyle-related factors, future research should emphasize the importance of psychological support mechanisms. Investigating the role of structured mental health services, including counseling, peer support networks, and institutional wellness programs, may offer a more holistic approach to mitigating burnout. Addressing both individual behaviors and systemic workplace issues is crucial in fostering a healthier, more supportive clinical environment. A commitment to multidimensional wellness strategies targeting physical, emotional, and organizational domains is key to achieving sustainable improvements in healthcare professionals' well-being. Such efforts not only benefit providers but also contribute significantly to improved patient care and overall healthcare outcomes.

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