



A GUIDE FOR BENEFITS LEADERS

Recognizing and addressing stress and burnout in the workforce

Some amount of stress in life is inevitable. Yet recent surveys have found that up to 60% of U.S. adults experience significant stress daily.¹

Ongoing feelings of stress can have a serious emotional and physical impact on those who suffer from it.

Meanwhile, stress arising from financial concerns, relationships, family responsibilities and personal safety follows us into the workplace. And sometimes, the workplace itself is the source of our stress.

Employers have a unique opportunity to identify, acknowledge and address stress and burnout among their employees. This guide—developed with input from our in-house mental health clinicians and human resources executives—offers resources and strategies to better support the overall health, well-being and productivity of your workforce.



\$300 billion annually

The cost of work stress and burnout to U.S. employers as a result of accidents, absenteeism, employee turnover, diminished productivity, direct medical, legal and insurance costs, and workers' compensation.²



What is stress?

Stress is broadly defined as the brain and body's response to some kind of demand.³ Although it typically carries a negative connotation, not all stress is bad.

Eustress is “good” stress that results from engaging in challenging yet achievable, enjoyable or meaningful tasks—such as taking on a major project at work. It gives a person a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, facilitates personal growth, and leads to increased resilience.⁴

On the other hand, stress that overwhelms or pressures a person may be either **acute**—a temporary feeling that helps a person manage a potentially dangerous situation—or **chronic**, which lasts for a prolonged period of time and may be caused by financial difficulties, relationship problems or work troubles.

Emotional and behavioral consequences of stress⁵

- Anxiety and depression
- Increased anger and irritability
- Lack of energy/interest/motivation
- Interpersonal problems

Physical consequences of stress⁶

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Upset stomach
- Muscle tension
- Changes in appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Chest tightness and dizziness



Burnout is not considered a medical condition, but rather a factor that influences whether a person contacts health services. For people with existing mental health issues or chronic conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure, burnout can exacerbate these challenges.

Dr. Julia Hoffman,
VP of mental health strategy, Teladoc Health



Stress vs. burnout

Burnout is a specific syndrome recognized by the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11) as resulting from chronic workplace stress.⁷ It's characterized by feelings of exhaustion or energy depletion, feelings of negativity towards one's job and reduced professional efficacy.

Common causes of burnout include⁸:

- Overwhelming job demands
- Conflicting job requirements
- Lack of proper resources, support and training
- Lack of constructive feedback
- Lack of autonomy
- Poor work-life balance

Common consequences of burnout include⁹:

- **Emotional and behavioral** concerns such as anxiety and depression, anger and irritability, alcohol or substance misuse, and isolation and relationship distress
- **Physical symptoms and problems** such as fatigue, insomnia, heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and vulnerability to illnesses

Burnout affects organizations when it leads to¹⁰:

- Employee ineffectiveness
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Interpersonal and communication issues
- Reduced commitment to the organization

The link between mental health and chronic conditions

90% of America's \$3.8 trillion annual healthcare costs are spent on people with chronic physical and mental health conditions¹¹

70% of mental health patients have a medical co-morbidity¹²

68% of our members with hypertension registered high blood pressure following COVID-19 – related lockdowns¹³

26% increase in stress among our members with diabetes compared to pre-pandemic levels¹⁴

The impact of COVID-19 on mental health

The pandemic amplified stress and burnout

84% of American adults said they experienced at least one emotion tied to prolonged stress in the prior two weeks¹⁵

Up to 77% of employees reported burnout¹⁶

Yet it also led to more people choosing to use virtual mental health services¹⁷

610% increase among millennials (ages 25-40)

691% increase in repeat visits for anxiety

435% increase in repeat visits for depression

For the organization: Stress in the workplace

Signs of stress and burnout:

Stress will typically cause an employee to overengage.

The employee may feel anxious that they are not productive enough, so they will appear more active and more urgent in their work and even stand out from their colleagues.¹⁸

Burnout, however, will cause an employee to underengage. The employee may feel so exhausted by or negative towards their work that they will appear detached, disengaged and unproductive.¹⁹ They may also exhibit decreased enthusiasm or increased negativity towards work and isolate themselves from others.²⁰

What you can do to combat stress and burnout²¹:

Demonstrate empathy by recognizing that stress and burnout exist, and supporting employees by creating fair workloads, setting clear expectations and giving employees a sense of autonomy and control over their work.

Encourage employees to take care of themselves (and model these behaviors) by supporting mental health days, reminding them to use their allotted vacation time and striving for work-life balance.

Offer flexibility with schedules and remote work opportunities, within reason.

Promote professional development activities to educate, train and support future leaders.

Encourage employees to connect with the value of their work, and to invest in friendships at work.

Celebrate individual, team and company accomplishments.

Tips for engaging employees in conversation about stress and burnout:

Listen. Show compassion and appreciation that your colleague confided in you. A simple “Thank you for trusting me with this information” or “I’m here to listen” is a good place to start.

Respond with empathy.

“What you’re going through sounds difficult.”

“It seems like you’ve got a lot on your plate right now.”

Remain non-judgmental. Do not minimize or maximize how a person is feeling. Language to avoid:
“Don’t worry, this is just a small problem.”
“Stop focusing on the bad stuff; look at all the good things you have going for you.”

Refer to their experience as a continuum. Recognize that we all have ups and downs in life, and there are times when mental health, like physical health, will be better and times when it will be worse.

Let them know if you “get” it. Have you felt a similar experience? Share it so the person doesn’t feel so alone. If relevant, indicate that you or a friend or family member found therapy helpful.

Be prepared for emotional reactions. Everyone expresses themselves in a different manner. Prepare yourself for different potential reactions. Allow them to express their emotions fully. Stay calm and be a good listener.

Stay up to date on your company’s mental health resources. Helping someone understand resources without discussing details can also make a difference.



For the company: Supporting stressed employees

Create a culture designed to identify stress and potential concerns early

Psychological safety is defined as the ability to speak up and embrace conflict without fear of embarrassment, rejection or punishment.²⁶ Teams that demonstrate psychological safety are more successful across every metric. **Here's how you can establish it at your own organization.**

- Reinforce or reward the attitudes and actions you want employees to engage in more often
- Measure cultural attributes, ask employees for feedback and act on that feedback
- Train managers how to navigate life challenges that employees may be facing

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Stress can be contagious, both because of normal human empathy and because when one team member struggles, colleagues may need to pick up the slack. Yet there are ways to effectively address stress across the organization through culture, flexibility and benefit design.

Arnon Geshuri,
Chief Human Resources Officer, Teladoc Health

Reduce burnout by promoting flexibility

Consider alternative work arrangements on a temporary or permanent basis when appropriate. And re-evaluate all your processes—from schedules to locations to review cycles—to ensure they are still effective and aligned with the company culture.

Combat stress and burnout through comprehensive benefits design

When stress and burnout lead to more serious physical and emotional issues, employees should know they have easy, confidential and affordable access to high-quality mental health care. **Consider the following when considering mental health care solutions:**

- Ensure that medical benefits include adequate access to mental health, with coverage in all 50 states
- Reduce stigma and access issues by offering care options that allow employees to engage from the comfort of home
- Choose evidence-based clinical solutions that people will trust for their care

Expectations of an evolving workforce

48% of millennials said they prefer a virtual visit with a physician to an in-person one²²

79% of employees want benefit plans to include virtual care for mental health as well as physical health²³

Beyond acute needs, virtual care has growing appeal for people with more complex needs²⁴

Customer satisfaction with telehealth ranks among the highest of any consumer category studied by J.D. Power²⁵

- Be aware of vendor fatigue among your employees—look for solutions that are intuitive, easy to use, and offer a single entry-point to multiple programs
- Acknowledge the connection between mind and body by offering chronic condition management programs that include a mental health component



A preference for accessible, comprehensive mental and physical care²⁷

8 in 10 mental health support seekers are comfortable using mental health resources offered through their employer

69% would find it overwhelming to use multiple virtual or digital resources to address mental health needs

78% prefer a single, unified experience for self-management of mental and physical health

When employees feel supported and have access to the resources they need to manage their mental health, managers and organizations can reduce the impact of stress and burnout on overall health and productivity.

The tips in this guide are provided to help you effectively and appropriately support those seeking help in your workplace. There are many other resources available to support specific situations. For more information, please visit these organizations:

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**
- **Mental Health America**
- **U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, MentalHealth.gov**

¹<https://news.gallup.com/poll/310250/worry-stress-fuel-record-drop-life-satisfaction.aspx>

²<https://www.stress.org/workplace-stress>

³<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/>

⁴<https://dictionary.apa.org/eustress>

⁵<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/01/stressed-america>

⁶<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/sia-mental-health-crisis.pdf>

⁷<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>

⁸<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>

⁹<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>

¹⁰<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>

¹¹<https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/costs/index.htm#ref1>

¹²Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

¹³Peterson, Eric D., and Bimal Shah. 2020. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Blood Pressure Trends Utilizing a National Remote Monitoring Platform." American Heart Association Scientific Sessions. November 17, 2020.

¹⁴Data on file (DS-5222).

¹⁵<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/index>

¹⁶<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/burnout-survey.html>

¹⁷Data based on Mental Health services growth overall T1 (3/1/2019) over T2 (3/1/2020 – 3/1/2021), Teladoc Health book-of-business

¹⁸<https://ada.com/signs-of-burnout/>

¹⁹<https://ada.com/signs-of-burnout/>

²⁰<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/high-octane-women/201311/the-tell-tale-signs-burnout-do-you-have-them>

²¹<https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/0817/pages/how-to-prevent-employee-burnout.aspx>

²²MobiHealth News

²³Leger

²⁴Accenture

²⁵J.D. Power

²⁶<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/what-is-psychological-safety-at-work/>

²⁷Teladoc Health Mental Health Survey, May 2021.



LEARN MORE: TeladocHealth.com | engage@teladochealth.com

About Teladoc Health: Teladoc Health is transforming the healthcare experience and empowering people everywhere to live healthier lives. Recognized as the world leader in whole-person virtual care, Teladoc Health leverages more than a decade of expertise and data-driven insights to meet the growing virtual care needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.