

FEEL THE BURN

Running from one thing to another can create a vicious cycle. Here's how to break it

LAST YEAR, MY WORKOUTS had dropped off considerably, and when I did hit the gym, I was unfocused. My demanding job and impending divorce were taking their toll — I was burned out.

“Burnout is something that spans both personal and business life,” says Mary Lewis, business coach and author of *Break Free From Burnout in 30 Days* (Life Renovations, 2002). “[It’s] defined as physical and mental exhaustion, especially as a result of low levels of chronic stress.”

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How do you know if you’re burned out? Typically, the most obvious symptom is exhaustion, which can be felt in four ways: emotionally (you either don’t feel emotions or they erupt very easily), physically (you have a hard time doing anything), intellectually (you don’t have the brain power to function) and spiritually (you’ve given up your connection with the divine).

Figuring out what’s wrong in your life can shed light on the causes of your burnout. Lewis suggests asking yourself the following: Why am I tired? Do I just not get enough sleep? Is it that I’m not stimulated at work? Or that my relationships drain as opposed to energize me?

“People often don’t identify these things. They think they’re working too



hard, but what they might be experiencing is deep-seated anger [that started] out as simple frustration,” says Lewis. “It can stem from not acknowledging what’s going well in their lives. It’s easy to pick out what’s wrong; it’s a lot harder to see what’s right. Because of that, people’s perceptions of their situations are skewed, and they can’t admit what’s really wrong.”

EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE

Burnout may be an easy thing to get caught up in, but it’s also relatively simple to cure. First, simplify your life. To begin, Lewis suggests tracking how you spend your time. For one week, write down how much time you spend sleeping, working, exercising, doing laundry, etc. This way you can get a clear picture of exactly what you’re currently doing as opposed to what you *want* to be doing.

The next step is to add a new word to your vocabulary. “One of the characteristics of people with burnout is that they

don’t know how to say no,” says Lewis. Start off by saying no to low-risk things (like, say, washing the car), so you get a feeling of success. Then work your way up until you’re more confident uttering that powerful word. “Every time you say yes to something, you’re saying no to something else,” Lewis explains. For example, when you say yes to your supervisor about staying late, you might be saying no to meeting your training partner for that heavy workout. And there is a graceful way to say it: “No, but here’s someone who can help you.” Lewis adds: “It’s important to get to know your ‘no’ muscle.”

As for me, my workouts are back on track, and friends say I look more rested. Most importantly, I know what burnout feels like, and I now make conscious decisions not to start stress-fueled forest fires.

Carey Rossi is an editor and writer living in Los Angeles.

Ahhh, time to work the “no” muscle

