- Job stress / Burnout (Psychology) / Heart diseases

Address work stress to avoid burning out

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Stressed out and clocking up too many hours at work again?



Be warned, 'job burnout' – physical, mental and emotional exhaustion – is not only bad for your personal life, but can also seriously affect your heart.

In a study involving nearly 9000 men and women, Medical researchers from Tel Aviv University found that job burnout is associated with a 40 per cent increased risk of coronary heart disease, eventually leading to illness, angina or heart attacks.

Factors that contribute to job burnout include high stress, heavy workload, a sense of having no control over situations, lack of emotional support and long work hours.

The lead researcher said the results were "alarming" and more extreme than expected.

Most shockingly, participants with the highest burnout scores had a 79 per cent increased risk of heart disease.

The study, published a few years ago in Psychosomatic Medicine, found that job burnout is a stronger predictor of heart disease than either smoking, blood lipid levels or physical activity.

Early warning signs of burnout include feeling cynical or irritable at work, feeling drained, insomnia, frequent headaches and muscle pains, and regularly using food, alcohol or drugs to boost your mood. You might also feel empty and lacking in motivation, or isolated from others.

If you think you're at risk of burnout, start making healthier lifestyle choices right away.

Try to start the day with a healthy breakfast and a brisk 15-minute walk.

Exercise three to five times a week (aerobic exercise is particularly helpful for stress) and get at least seven hours sleep a night.

When you get home from work, turn off the laptop and smart phone. Dedicate some time to relax with friends or family, or take up a new hobby.

See your doctor for a check up and take a break from work if necessary – you might also benefit from psychological therapy.

If you're struggling with your workload, talk to your boss rather than suffering in silence. Learn how to say 'no' and prioritise the important tasks, instead of trying to be a super-man or woman.

Go for a walk at lunchtime. Ask if you can do flexible hours or work from home.

If your job no longer fits your interests, it may be time to look for something new.