

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

# AI and "Brain Fry"

The Freeman · 20 Apr 2026 · (by Thomas Urbain/AFP)

Consultants at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have dubbed the phenomenon "AI brain fry," a state of mental exhaustion stemming "from the excessive use or supervision of artificial intelligence tools, pushed beyond our cognitive limits."

Marketing	25.9%
Human resources/people operations	19.3
Operations	17.9
Engineering/software development	17.8
Finance/accounting	16.7
Information technology (IT)	16.0
Sales/business development	12.5
Customer service/support	10.6
Service provider/consultant	10.3
Product management	8.6
Management/leadership	8.6
Legal/compliance	5.6

### 'Irritable'

Wigler noted that the promise of hitting goals fast with AI tempts tech start-up teams already prone to long workdays to lose track of time and stay on the job even deeper into the night.

"There is a unique kind of reward hacking that can go on when you have productivity at the scale that encourages even later hours," Wigler said. Mackintosh recalled spending 15 consecutive hours fine-tuning around 25,000 lines of code in an application.

"At the end, I felt like I couldn't code anymore," he recalled. "I could tell my dopamine was shot because I was irritable and didn't want to answer basic questions about my day."

A musician and teacher who asked to remain anonymous spoke of struggling to put his brain "on pause", instead spending evenings experimenting with AI.

Nonetheless, everyone interviewed for this story expressed overall positive views of AI despite the downsides.

BCG recommends in a recently published study that company leaders establish clear limits regarding employee use and supervision of AI.

However, "That self-care piece is not really an America workplace value," Wigler said. "So, I am very skeptical as to whether or not its going to be healthy or even high quality in the long term."

# AI and "Brain Fry"

**Heavy users of artificial intelligence report being overwhelmed by trying to keep up with and on top of the technology designed to make their lives easier. Too many lines of code to analyze, armies of AI assistants to wrangle, and lengthy prompts to draft are among the laments by hard-core AI adopters.**

Consultants at Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have dubbed the phenomenon "AI brain fry," a state of mental exhaustion stemming "from the excessive use or supervision of artificial intelligence tools, pushed beyond our cognitive limits."

The rise of AI agents that tend to computer tasks on demand has put users in the position of managing smart, fast digital workers rather than having to grind through jobs themselves.

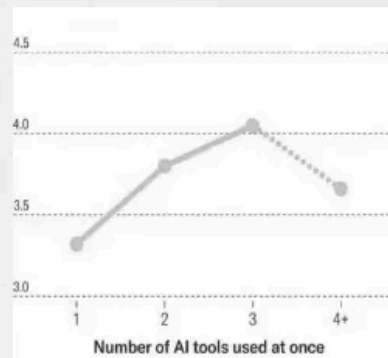
"It's a brand-new kind of cognitive load," said Ben Wigler, co-founder of the start-up LoveMind AI. "You have to really babysit these models."

People experiencing AI burnout are not

casually dabbling with the technology -- They are creating legions of agents that need to be constantly managed, according to Tim Norton, founder of the AI integration consultancy *nouvel ahs*.

"That's what's causing the burnout," Norton wrote in an X post. However, BCG and others do not see it as a case of AI causing people to get burned out on their jobs.

A BCG study of 1,488 professionals in the United States actually found a decline in burnout rates when AI took over repetitive work tasks.



### Coding Vigilance

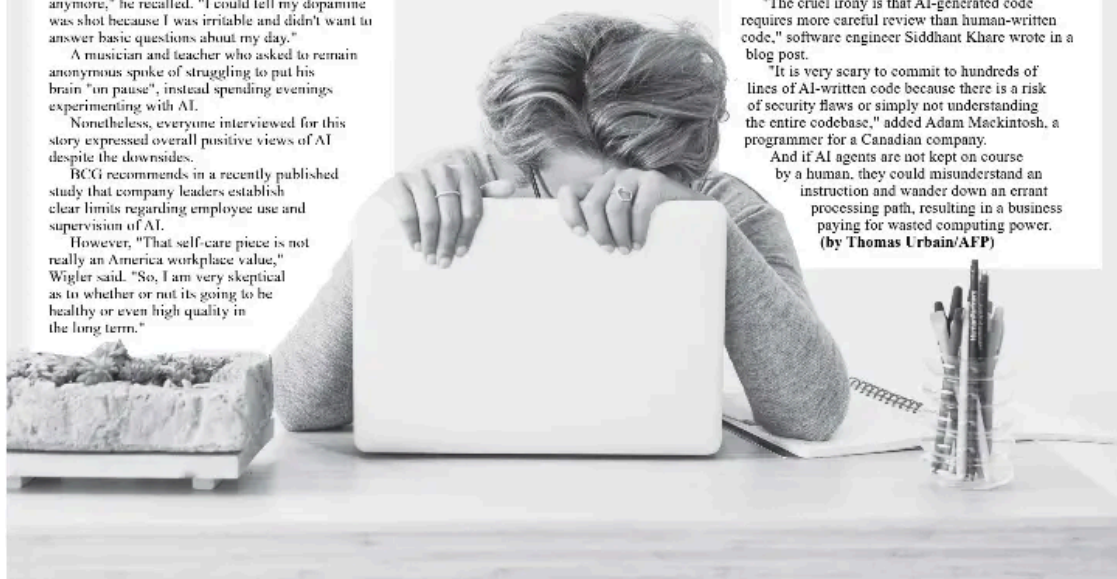
For now, "brain fry" is primarily a bane for software developers given that AI agents have excelled quickly at writing computer code.

"The cruel irony is that AI-generated code requires more careful review than human-written code," software engineer Siddhant Khare wrote in a blog post.

"It is very scary to commit to hundreds of lines of AI-written code because there is a risk of security flaws or simply not understanding the entire codebase," added Adam Mackintosh, a programmer for a Canadian company.

And if AI agents are not kept on course by a human, they could misunderstand an instruction and wander down an errant processing path, resulting in a business paying for wasted computing power.

(by Thomas Urbain/AFP)



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