

Today's Classic Burnout: Having It All . . . Including the Stress

*“Knowing is not enough; we must apply.
Wishing is not enough; we must do.”*

—**JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**

IN THIS CHAPTER, we're going to be discussing burnout and how it can affect women both mentally and physically. To see where you fall on the burnout spectrum, take a moment to answer the following quiz.

QUIZ: ARE YOU BURNED OUT?

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Answer the following questions as honestly as you can, keeping in mind how you feel now. After you've completed the quiz, add up the total of the questions you've answered yes to.

1. No matter how much sleep you get, do you wake up feeling tired and unrested? Y/N
2. Do you hit a wall in the afternoon? Y / N

3. Do you have sugar, salt, or starch cravings that you can't seem to get under control? Y / N
4. Are you using alcohol, food, or drugs in the evening or after work to relax? Y / N
5. Do you need to use something to increase energy throughout the day, such as caffeine, prescribed medicines, or supplements? Y / N
6. Are you easily irritated by small problems or by coworkers or family? Y / N
7. Do you have negative thoughts about your job and feel you are not getting out what you are putting into it? Y / N
8. Do you feel unsupported by your spouse or feel you are doing the majority of the work in your household? Y / N
9. Do you often experience unexplained sadness? Y / N
10. Are you forgetting appointments or deadlines, or are you losing personal possessions (like your keys) regularly? Y / N
11. Are you seeing family members and friends less frequently? Y / N
12. Are you too busy to keep up with routine phone calls, read reports, or remember birthdays or celebrations? Y / N
13. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself? Y / N
14. Does sex seem like more trouble than its worth? Y / N
15. Are you experiencing more PMS or menopausal or hormonal changes? Y / N
16. Do you gain weight easily, especially around the belly? Y / N
17. Do you feel your skin is aging or feel as if you're aging to quickly? Y / N
18. Are you experiencing anxiety or does your heart race often? Y / N
19. Are you experiencing increased physical complaints (body pain, headaches, lingering colds or flu)? Y / N
20. Do you have brain fog and lack of focus and memory? Y / N
21. Do you feel you are achieving less than you should? Y / N

Total yes answers: _____

1–5 yes answers: You might be okay for now, but be careful because you are at risk of burning out. Now is the best time to implement new strategies to achieve balance.

6–10 yes answers: You can't keep doing this to yourself; you've got moderate burnout. It is time to change at least three areas of your life to adjust your course.

11–15 yes answers: Danger! We've got work to do. You are suffering from significant burnout. You should make diet, sleep, and hormone changes in the next 90 days.

16–21 yes answers: You might want to sit down for this—you've got severe burnout. This should be treated immediately through diet, hormone adjustments, brain support, lifestyle adjustments, and supplementation.

After completing this quiz, you should have a good idea of where you are on the burnout scale. And no matter how severe your burnout is, the good news is that you are very close to discovering real solutions to overcoming this state.

ON THE EDGE OF BURNOUT

Today, most women are constantly dealing with an undercurrent of stress in their lives. We all have it rough in this day and age, but studies show that women have twice the level of stress and stress-related disorders (such as anxiety, depression, and physical problems tied to stress) as men do.¹

In fact, numerous studies have shown that high-achieving women have a constant internal turmoil that is detrimental to their health and quality

1 M. Pilar Matud, "Gender Differences in Stress and Coping Styles," *Science Direct* 37, no. 7 (2004): 1401–1415, doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.010

of life.² This is something that I find simply unacceptable. More than that, I consider burnout for these brilliant woman a tragedy. High-achieving, driven, passionate women everywhere are maxed out, addicted to being busy, and thriving on chaos (or at least fooling themselves into thinking that they're thriving). Keeping busy at all costs is now the cultural norm, but, if brilliant women took a moment to really consider what they were doing to themselves, they might take a step back and start taking on less. Manic busyness can lead to

- Exhaustion
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Social comparison (a cousin of FOMO, or fear of missing out)
- Inauthenticity
- Significant physical and mental symptoms

The inner drive to do more and achieve more is significantly impacting women's health, families, and careers. And one of the problems with burnout is that it's so intricately woven into women's lives that even the brightest of women are not able to identify the telltale signs until it is too late. The path to burnout is caused by a complex and interacting web of stressors, but they all boil down to a few key causes:

- Women's expanded roles (home, career, children, parents)
- Constant sensory stimulation
- Social pressures to achieve more and have more

² "Americans Engage in Unhealthy Behaviors to Manage Stress," American Psychological Association, February 23, 2006, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2006/01/stress-management.aspx>.

- Family and child expectations
- Financial constraints
- Poor lifestyle habits (sleep, diet, exercise, hormone imbalances, and brain chemical deficiencies)
- Adrenaline addiction

You must also remember that getting burned out is not your fault, because it simply isn't. It's something that has insidiously made its way into the constructs of modern society and become the norm. These days, women are expected to take on more than they can handle, and so burnout has become more common. The brilliant woman may be able to sustain the chaos for some time, but the stress will eventually take its toll. Full-throttle burnout can take months or years to manifest, but a meltdown is inevitable.

Over the past 25 years, but primarily in the past 5 years, I have witnessed significant burnout in colleagues, friends, family, and thousands of patients. I have seen countless women who once had sparkles in their eyes and fires in their bellies, driving them toward adventure, challenge, and pursuing their passions, eventually fall victim to intense fatigue, depression, anxiety, health decline, and loss of their zest for life. Their flame simply went out.

Burnout is a villain that quietly and skillfully robs women of what makes them brilliant, and it's effective because of its gradual onset that works below the surface, traveling methodically through the each of its stages, ultimately leaving women feeling lost and desperate, with no clue how they got there or what to do about it. If you feel constantly rushed or in a hurry and can't seem to catch up, but you still want more from your life and know you are too young and too smart to jump ship, then I am here to tell you that you are not alone.