Six steps to beat burnout in a pandemic

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The forced shift to remote work was for many professionals a dream come true, but six months on and the [work from honeymoon](#) appears to be well and truly over.

Between a global pandemic, lockdowns, and juggling the demands of full-time work with children, pets and partners, on top of months working from spaces never designed to double as a home office, 2020 is no picnic.

Workers may have ditched the daily commute and enjoyed greater flexibility, but they're also working longer, having more meetings and [feeling more stressed.](#)

Alison Hill, psychologist and CEO of Pragmatic Thinking. says the coronavirus pandemic has been a rollercoaster for many.

The average workday has [increased by 48.5 minutes](#) while research from Microsoft found scheduled meetings were up 30 per cent and video calls spiked by 1000 per cent.

"It's felt like a hugely long year, it feels like five decades have passed," says psychologist and co-founder of Pragmatic Thinking Alison Hill.

"This has felt more like a rollercoaster with waves of highs and lows so when people are feeling focused, they say they're more productive but then the lows are lower."

Given the barrage of challenges thrown at professionals this year, experts say it's hardly surprising [burnout is on the rise](#).

"This is a cocktail for burnout, and for many of us, it's simmering behind the scenes," says Stuart Taylor, chief executive of Springfox, which provides corporate resilience programs.

"I do believe we're heading for a tsunami of mental health issues as a result of the experience that people have had over the course of this year."

The shift to remote working has also exacerbated [burnout](#) as the boundaries between work and home become increasingly blurred.

Rachel Setti says working from home is exacerbating the burnout trend.

"Resilience, which is characterised by our ability to bounce back from adversity, is being challenged because of the ongoing nature of the pandemic," says organisational psychologist Rachel Setti.

"This is because it is more difficult to bounce back when the setbacks are repeated, ongoing and unending."

If you're feeling low on energy or exhausted, negativity, distanced from work or just not that effective at your job, chances are you're probably [suffering from burnout](#), according to the World Health Organisation.

"We were already seeing burnout pre-COVID-19 ... productivity had become our disease where every waking moment was already full," says Penny Locaso, author of *Hacking Happiness*.

If every day feels like Groundhog Day and you're [suffering from the signs of burnout](#), don't just push through. Here's what the experts suggest.

1. Acknowledge the situation

There has been a 3 per cent decline in wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic, with figures hitting a low in June at the peak of global lockdowns, data from Culture Amp reveals.

Culture Amp co-founder Didier Elzinga said companies' resilience scores had also been steadily dropping, in a further sign that people were wearing out.

Pre-COVID resilience levels were around 76 per cent, but dropped to 69 per cent in June and 61 per cent in July.

"These figures represent a massive shift and speak to the fact that we're all feeling the strain of the past few months," he said.

Hill says it's important for people to identify if they're struggling and identify that there's a problem.

"It's really important to have that self-awareness and put a name to it and whether that's burnout, being overwhelmed or just feeling flat, I think being able to articulate it is really important," she says.

Insert actions into your routine that create a barrier of time and space between work and leisure.

— Rachel Setti

2. Keep an eye on blurred boundaries

Experts say it can be useful to do an audit of work hours if your work life is constantly eating into your personal life, especially when working from home.

"When it comes to the drivers of wellbeing, there is the obvious one around managing personal and work-life demands," says Elzinga.

"Companies perhaps need to look at systematic changes to how work gets done and expectations of their people."

Doing worthwhile and enjoyable work is a key buffer to burnout right now, says Culture Amp's Didier Elzinga. *Wayne Taylor*

Don't be afraid to speak to your manager if you're starting to feel burnt out.

"We haven't done this before, certainly not for this length of time, so having that question of what do you want work to be, set your productivity around what works for you and have a conversation with your leader or manager," says Hill.

"Discuss what output needs to get delivered if you have an hour off in the middle of the day to go and exercise because the kids are at school."

3. Don't neglect the basics

Making the effort to take care of your physical and mental health can go a long way in preventing burnout and increasing resilience, according to Taylor.

Penny Locaso recommends starting the day planning how you want it to unfold.

Follow a healthy diet, have sufficient sleep and exercise.

Setti also recommends creating rituals to differentiate between work and leisure.

"Insert actions into your routine that create a barrier of time and space between work and leisure so perhaps exercise just before or after work, make a social call at the end of your workday, cook a meal," she says.

Gift yourself the start of the day to lay out a plan of action, Locaso says.

"Start the day intentionally, even if it is just getting up 10 minutes earlier, sitting down with a pen and paper and writing down how you would like the day to unfold," she says.

4. Stay connected

Having strong, positive relationships with friends and family is important for mental wellbeing.

"Stay connected and spend time enjoying the presence of loved ones daily – even if this is over a phone call," Taylor says.

He also recommends connecting with co-workers to catch up on topics unrelated to work.

5. Focus on what brings joy

When feeling negative, Setti recommends focusing on aspects of work that are stimulating and meaningful.

"If you can't identify any aspects of your work which create meaning for you, then look outside of work," she says.

All work and no play will quickly put workers on the fast-track to burnout, says Taylor.

Make time to enjoy things you love doing and find time for hobbies.

Hill recommends setting aside time every day for "recovery time".

"Where can you step away from work? What are the activities that re-energise you?" she says.

Hill's team at Pragmatic Thinking are encouraged to go outdoors at midday every day.

"For some people, that's literally just stepping outside in the sunshine, for others, it might be a workout," she says. "Having that rhythm, particularly in the middle of the day, is really important."

Locaso recommends starting a "pride jar" noting any achievements from the day.

"It can be anything. For example, I spent 15 minutes helping my child with their schoolwork," she says.

"What that does is that you don't get to the end of the day looking at all the things you haven't done. You get to the end of the day and you acknowledge you've done something."

6. Have a staycation

If you've had to cancel your holiday plans because of coronavirus, try a staycation at home. *iStock*

The coronavirus pandemic and border closures have put paid to many holiday plans this year.

With borders closed for most of the year and weeks spent in lockdown, especially in Victoria which has endured the country's longest and hardest lockdown, many people have worked through the time they had planned to take annual leave.

Even if you can't travel, Setti says taking some time off can be very beneficial.

"Holidays act as a circuit breaker and play a vital role in helping us replenish and reframe, both physically and mentally," she says.

"Do not cancel your holiday, restructure it."