



# Symptoms of a burnout: Recognise and prevent



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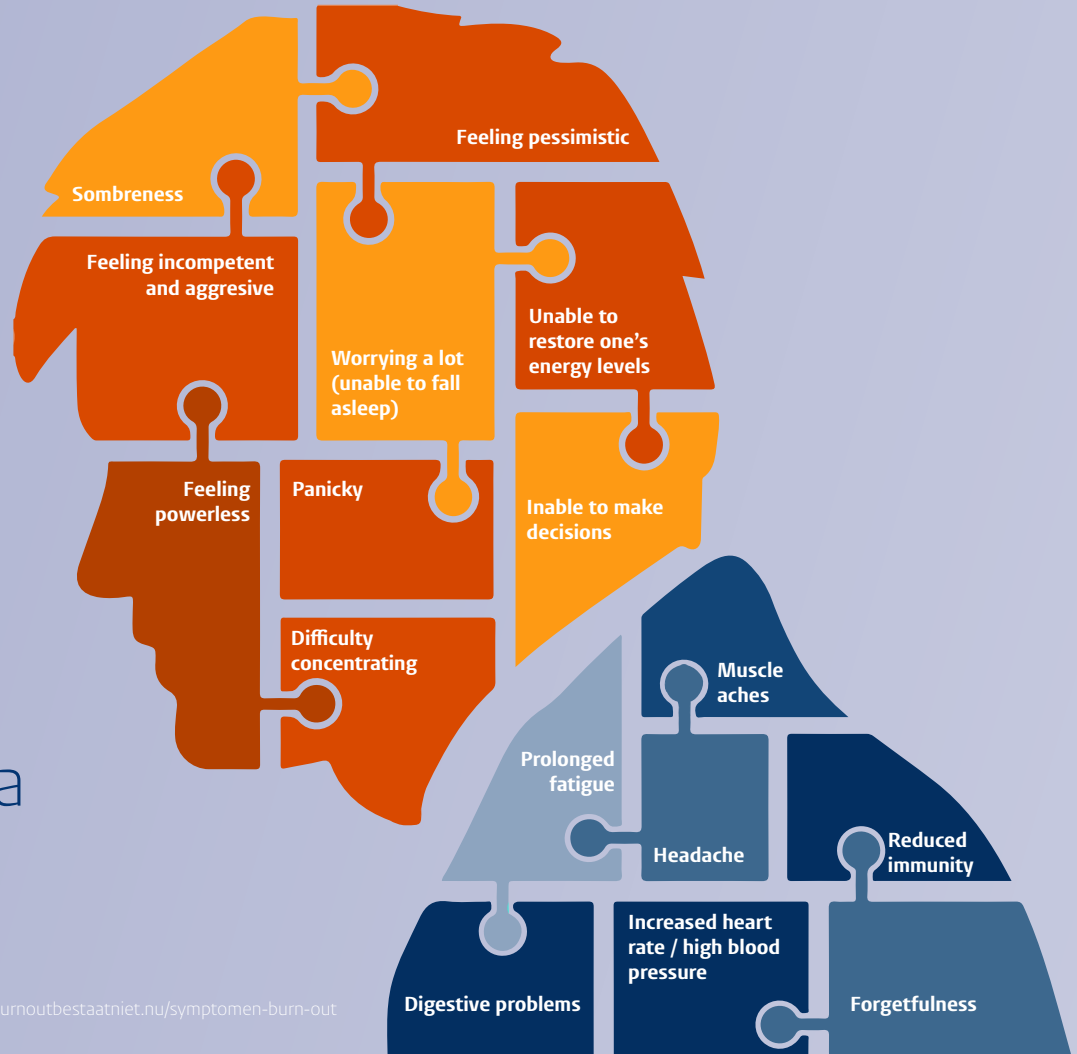
# Symptoms of a burnout:

## Recognise and prevent

You are a line manager, and you have noticed that one of your colleagues is really starting to struggle. Anything you say – however well-intentioned – to encourage the employee to take things a little easier falls on deaf ears or is even rejected out of hand. But then comes the phone call you've been expecting: the employee is sick. They might rebound and return to work, but a few days later they call in sick again. It becomes an all-too-familiar pattern. Until the day comes that they are off sick for a week, then two, then longer... The employee has a burnout.

You think to yourself: There's nothing I could do to help... is there? Well, actually, there is! This leaflet provides information on how to deal better with an employee who is suffering from a burnout.

# How to recognise a burnout?



Source: <https://burnoutbestaatniet.nu/symptomen-burn-out>

## How to recognise a burnout?

A burnout doesn't just come out of nowhere. Sometimes you might think: 'But they seemed so strong, and now they are suddenly at home with a burnout.' While it might seem as though everything has happened so quickly, it is always preceded by a series of other developments. Have you noticed that one of your employees seems to be more irritated, is often tired, has trouble concentrating, or exhibits any of the other symptoms in the image on the right? They could be overworked or even on the road to a burnout. Being burnt out means that you are both physically and mentally exhausted. A burnout can be caused not only by stress at work, but also by stress in your personal life. Often it's a combination of the two.

If you notice that someone is behaving differently, the following symptoms can be a sign of a burnout:

- ▶ Neglecting themselves or their work
- ▶ A short fuse, and a lack of humour, creativity and flexibility
- ▶ Working from home more often, contact via email instead of in person or by phone
- ▶ Arriving late and leaving early
- ▶ Reduced productivity, failure to meet deadlines

## Your role of a line manager

If you sense that one of your employees is under too much stress, it is important to talk about it. But people suffering from the symptoms mentioned above, or displaying the signs of a burnout, might not realise they are unwell. And they might be reluctant to come to you to talk about it. Ask yourself: if you were in their shoes, would you (dare to) approach your manager or director? This is often perceived as a sign of weakness or an unwelcome intrusion.



Below are a few practical tips that you can use to talk to an overburdened employee:

- ▶ Don't suddenly pull someone away from their workplace; instead, mention that you would like to speak to them and ask them when would be a good time.
- ▶ Find a place where you can talk to each other undisturbed, or suggest going for a walk.
- ▶ Before the meeting, make a note of specific things that you have observed.
- ▶ Talk about these things from your perspective; you can say, for example, 'I've noticed,' and not 'you do this' and 'you are tired'.
- ▶ Also talk about how it is affecting you, e.g. you are worried and confused because you don't recognise this behaviour in them. Be honest. You are asking someone in a vulnerable situation about a sensitive subject (the other person really can feel that things are not going well). By talking about how the situation is affecting you, you are making it easier for them to open up.
- ▶ Then specify what it is you would like to know:
  - 'Is this something you recognise, too?'
  - 'How long has this been going on?'
  - 'Do you have any idea what brought this on?'
- ▶ One of the best things that you can do as a line manager is reassure your employee that they have your support and that the institute will help them to get back on their feet.

**So speak up:** make agreements, talk about it. Stay close, keep a finger on the pulse, be available, take the initiative.

The HR adviser is also there to support you; they can give you advice on how to prepare for such conversations, and they also have more information about the possibilities available for helping someone, such as a referral to the occupational physician or coaching.

#### Useful links:

- ▶ Recognising a burnout (in Dutch)
- ▶ First signs of a burnout (in Dutch)
- ▶ Specifically for PhD candidates
- ▶ The HR department's Intranet page



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