

**FAST FACTS AND CONCEPTS #169
HEALTH PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT – PART III**

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Background *Fast Facts* #167 and 168 described burnout, its risk factors, symptoms, and consequences. This *Fast Fact* will address strategies to avoid burnout while sustaining personal and professional health, integrity, and growth. *Fast Fact* #170 will describe assessment tools validated for burnout.

I. Individual Strategies

- Reflection upon work: journaling, discussion with colleagues.
 - Am I burned-out/healthy?
 - Why do I do this/continue to do this?
 - What inspired/moved/surprised me today?
- Attend to health: diet, exercise, rest, regular health care.
- Plan activities that rejuvenate: Play!
- Professional supervision: Regular interaction with a mental health professional with the express purpose of exploring dynamics of the provider/patient relationship.
- Make time for yourself
 - Plan vacations at regular intervals.
 - Allow for “time-out” when stressors increase.

II. Interpersonal Strategies

- Give important relationships priority – strengthen existing relationships with family and friends.
- Expand your community beyond existing relationships through activism or spiritual engagement.

III. Professional Strategies

- Debrief emotional events:
 - Reach out to colleagues.
 - Seek out or strengthen a mentor relationship.
 - Write about your work for a larger audience.
 - Utilize your institution’s *Critical Incident Response Team* if available.
 - Psychosocial rounds with colleagues to explore these issues.
 - *Schwartz Center Rounds*: interdisciplinary hospital rounds to explore emotions surrounding provider/patient interactions.
- Advocate for change in your job, organization, or profession.

Triggers for Professional Counseling

- Persistent feelings of sadness, exhaustion, anger, worthlessness, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, or anxiety interfering with work or interpersonal relationships.
- Self-prescribing sedative/hypnotic medication.
- Substance abuse: alcohol, prescription, or non-prescription drugs.
- Other ‘addictions’ interfering with work/relationships: gambling, exercise.
- Persistent sleep disturbance: nightmares, difficulty initiating or staying asleep, early morning awakening.
- Loss of professional boundaries:
 - Inappropriate relationships with patients, families, or trainees.
 - Lack of attention to patients’ rights, safety, or autonomy.

If, after careful attention to the variables within your control, you still feel burned-out and at risk for serious consequences, it may be necessary to temporarily or permanently leave your current job to regain your health.

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