



Business

Minimizing Stress & Burnout

Resource Guide

Introduction

Just as the ocean is influenced by the sun, moon, gravity, and the wind—stressors can have similar altering impacts on our inner stillness and peace. Life’s stressors have the ability to affect all areas of our lives.

We’ve compiled key learnings from Calm’s “How to Minimize Stress and Burnout” webinar to inspire self-reflection and provide tips to protect against burnout.

“If the ocean can calm itself, so can you. We are both salt water mixed with air.”

Nayyirah Waheed

Exploring Stress

Let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves, "is all stress bad?"

Considering that the stress response gave our ancestors evolutionary advantages to fight off or even avoid danger—the simple answer to that question would be no! If all stress were bad, none of us would be here!

What is the purpose of the stress response?

The stress response system helps us physically and behaviorally adapt to changing circumstances such as environmental threats or opportunities¹. Those threats were lions, tigers and bears to our ancestors. To us, those threats can look like tech fatigue, endless meetings and looming deadlines.

Exploring Stress

How does the body react to stress?²

- When a stressful event is experienced, the amygdala (the brain's emotional processing area) sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus (the brain's command center)
- The hypothalamus then communicates with the nervous system, pressing the gas pedal on the fight-or-flight response through the sympathetic nervous system
- The fight-or-flight response responds to perceived dangers by increasing the heart and breathing rates and pushes blood to the muscles, heart, and other vital organs
- All of these changes happen near instantaneously so most of us aren't aware of them
- In addition to pressing the gas pedal to adapt to stressors, the body promotes balance by also being equipped with a braking system as well. The parasympathetic nervous system is the braking system and promotes a "rest and digest" response that calms the body down after the danger has passed.

Chronic Stress and Health Consequences

Our bodies are well equipped to handle stress in small doses, but when stress becomes long-term or chronic, it can have serious health consequences. Some common manifestations of chronic stress are:

- Muscle tension and tension-type headaches
- Hypertension, heart attack or stroke
- Chronic fatigue
- Metabolic disorders (e.g. diabetes and obesity)
- Burnout

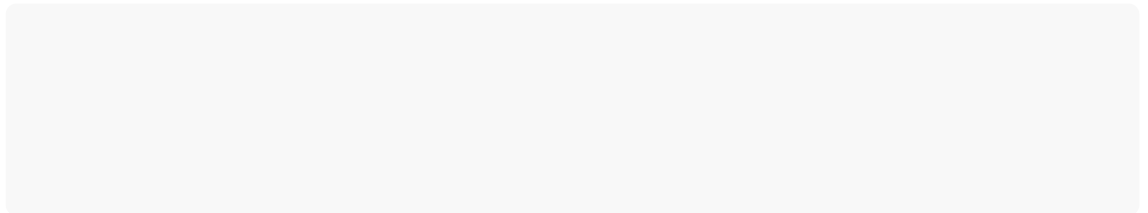
Get in the Habit of Noticing Stress

Reflecting on our daily activities can help uncover patterns associated with stress that we may not yet notice. To appreciate how stress impacts each of us personally, we have to first break free of auto-pilot to cultivate greater awareness of where stress impacts us most.

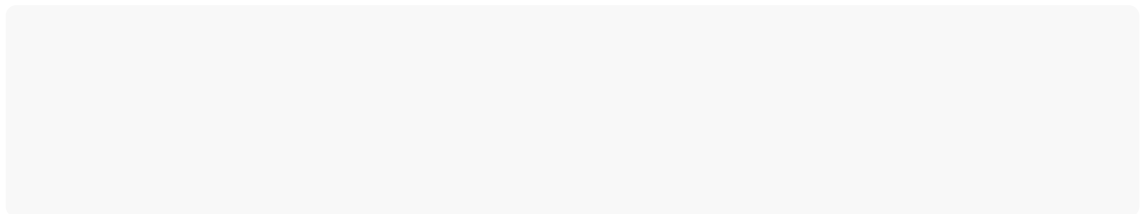
Use the Stress Curve

Break down your daily activities into three categories:

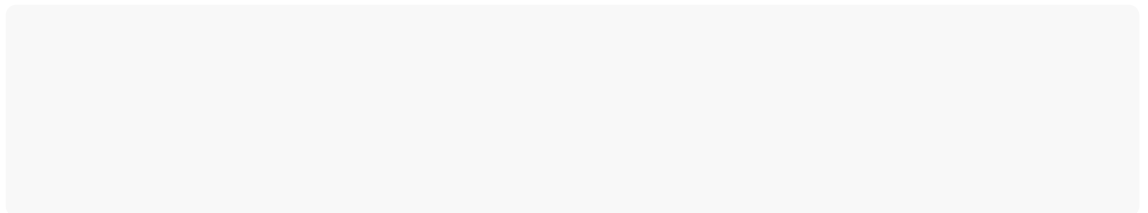
Morning



Afternoon

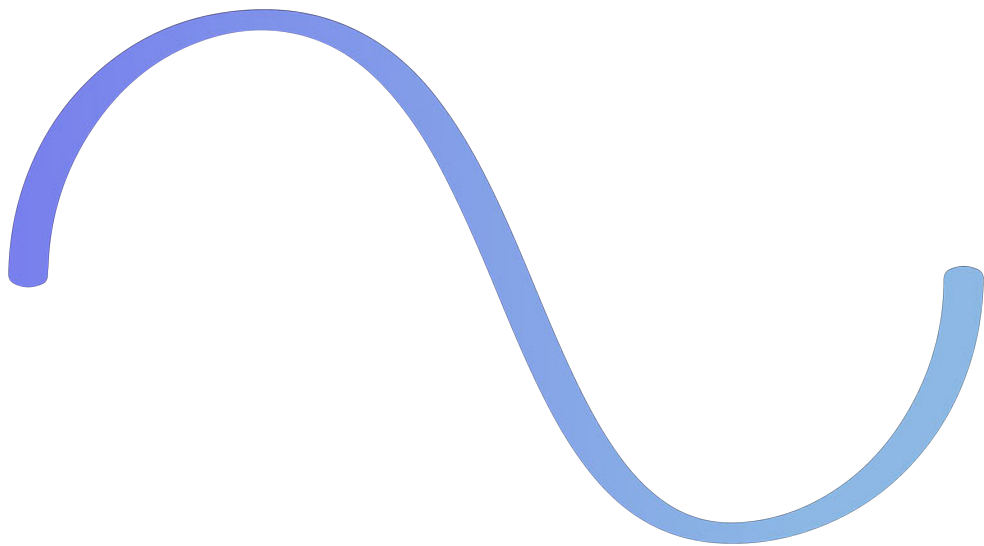


Evening



Get in the Habit of Noticing Stress

Note which of those activities are most stressful, mildly stressful, and most relaxing by drawing them on your curve .



Reflect for a moment on your personal curve. When do you often experience your most stressful activities?

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Get in the Habit of Noticing Stress

What reactions or sensations came up for you while writing down your activities?

EXAMPLE: *Did you feel tense writing any activities? Did you feel joy or happiness? Did any inspire a sense of relaxation?*

Compare the amount of relaxing activities in your days to those that are more stressful. Does one group outweigh the other?

EXAMPLE: *I noticed that I have more activities in my day that feel stressful compared to those that I consider relaxing*

Exploring Burnout

It's important to note that burnout is often rooted in caring deeply for the work that you're doing. Burnout is often an extreme manifestation of our inherent core values.

What differentiates burnout from stress?³

While burnout may indeed result from unrelenting stress, it is not the same as just having too much stress. Stress can be characterized through over-engagement, but stressed people can imagine themselves in a space of recovery through increasing commitments to personal stress management. Burnout, on the other hand, is characterized by disengagement. It is a slow burning process that takes a significant emotional toll, resulting in a longer, more incremental recovery period.

Gauging Burnout

Hallmark signs of burnout are often attributed to stress and can go unchecked until it becomes pervasive. Burnout can take the forms of:

- Feeling exhausted at the end of the day
- Feeling like you can't face another day at work or as a caretaker
- Feeling like what they do no longer matters or cynicism towards work
- Feeling as if you have a low level of control over influencing your own life
- Loss of a sense of the importance of, or purpose in the work you're doing

Let's Self-Reflect

Using a scale of 1 to 5 (1=not at all, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=very often) answer each of the following questions:

1. I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5

2. I have negative thoughts about my job

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5

3. I am easily irritated by small problems and/or my coworkers

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5

4. I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my coworkers

1 ————— 2 ————— 3 ————— 4 ————— 5

5. I feel like I am achieving less than I should



6. I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed



7. I feel that I am in the wrong profession



8. I feel there is more work to do, than I have the ability to do



9. I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve



10. I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing good quality work



Reflection Scoring Results

10-19 (Good To Go: Little to No Signs of Burnout)

20-34 (Proceed With Caution: Burnout Territory Near)

35-50 (Burnout Zone: Address Burnout Immediately)

*Note: This reflection is an informal gauge for assessing burnout. While it may be reflectionally useful, it is not scientifically validated. If you are interested in rigorously validated assessments, the Maslach Burnout Inventory may be useful.

TOTAL

Exploring Core Values

Examining core values can be a great way to get a handle on what's driving you beyond your physical, emotional, and mental limitations. Core value work can refocus our energy and redefine how we view ourselves, especially if we are recovering from burnout.

Take a look below for a list of common core values.

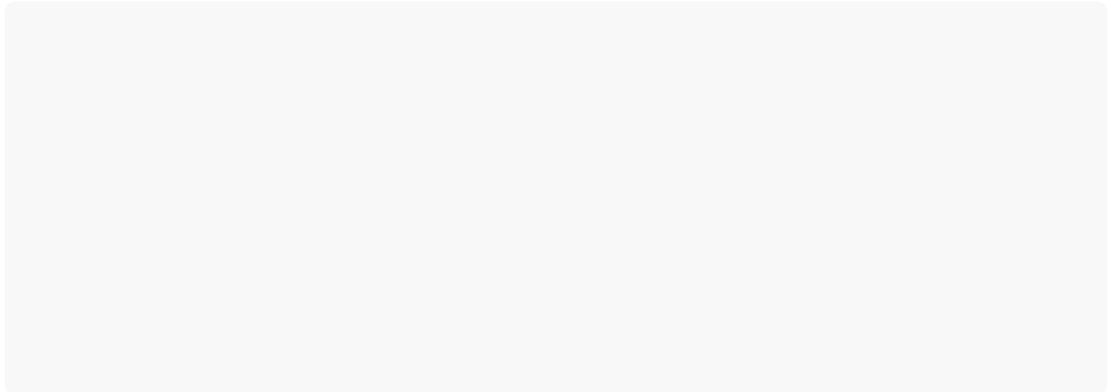
Circle core values that you identify with most.

| | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|
| Authenticity | Competency | Growth | Openness | Responsibility |
| Achievement | Contribution | Happiness | Optimism | Security |
| Adventure | Creativity | Honesty | Peace | Service |
| Authority | Curiosity | Humor | Pleasure | Self-respect |
| Balance | Determination | Influence | Poise | Stability |
| Beauty | Fairness | Justice | Popularity | Success |
| Boldness | Faith | Kindness | Recognition | Status |
| Compassion | Fame | Knowledge | Religion | Trustworthiness |
| Challenge | Friendships | Learning | Reputation | Wealth |
| Community | Fun | Loyalty | Respect | Wisdom |

Exploring Core Values

Share values of your own

The list of values above aren't all-inclusive. In the space below, share other values that come up for you.



Core Values and Burnout

We can summarize the hallmark signs of burnout in three key dimensions: ⁴

Exhaustion: feeling over extended and depleted of physical and emotional resources

Cynicism: negative, callous or excessively detached response to various aspects of your job or work

Low-efficacy: feelings of incompetence, lack of achievement or productivity at work

Exploring Core Values

Reflect for a moment on how any of those dimensions may be impacting your life through the lens of your core values.

Exhaustion:

How do your core values speak to pushing past your energy limits?

EXAMPLE: *Core values like achievement, responsibility, challenge, and reputation could make it harder to rest or end your day*

Cynicism:

What do your core values say about how you gauge the quality of your work?

EXAMPLE: *Core values like fun, fairness, and trustworthiness could influence your emotions around work and your work environment*

Low Efficacy:

What do your core values say about your confidence and ability to do your best work?

EXAMPLE: *Core values like balance, contribution, and creativity can dictate how confident you feel in being able to do your best work*

Toolbox Building: 6 Ways to Prevent and Manage Stress

- Gratitude Practice

- Mindfulness

- Physical Activity

- Taking Technology Breaks

- Setting Clear Boundaries

- Investing in Sleep

Take Action

Stress affects each of us differently. Reflecting on your stress curve and your common daily stressors, what can you do to release some of the pressures of stress for yourself this week?

Toolbox Building: 6 Ways to Prevent and Recover From Burnout

- Social Support and Connection

- Shifting Locus of Control or Perspective

- Reducing Workload

- Exploring Personal Values

- Creating Boundaries Between Home and Work Life

- Prioritizing Self Care

Take Action

If you self-identify with burnout or are at risk for burnout -- what self care actions can you commit to to further prevent it, or to recover?

Further Resources

Learn more: [The Daily Calm](#) →

These short, 10-minute meditations focus on different aspects of mindfulness and introduce new concepts for both beginner and advanced meditation students.

[How to Meditate](#) →

This 30-day program consists of 10-15-minute meditations by author and meditation instructor Jeff Warren. Each day of the program provides a quick meditation session, along with tips that answer common questions about meditating.

[Mindfulness at Work](#) →

A collection of sessions to reduce stress, improve relationships, and boost productivity.

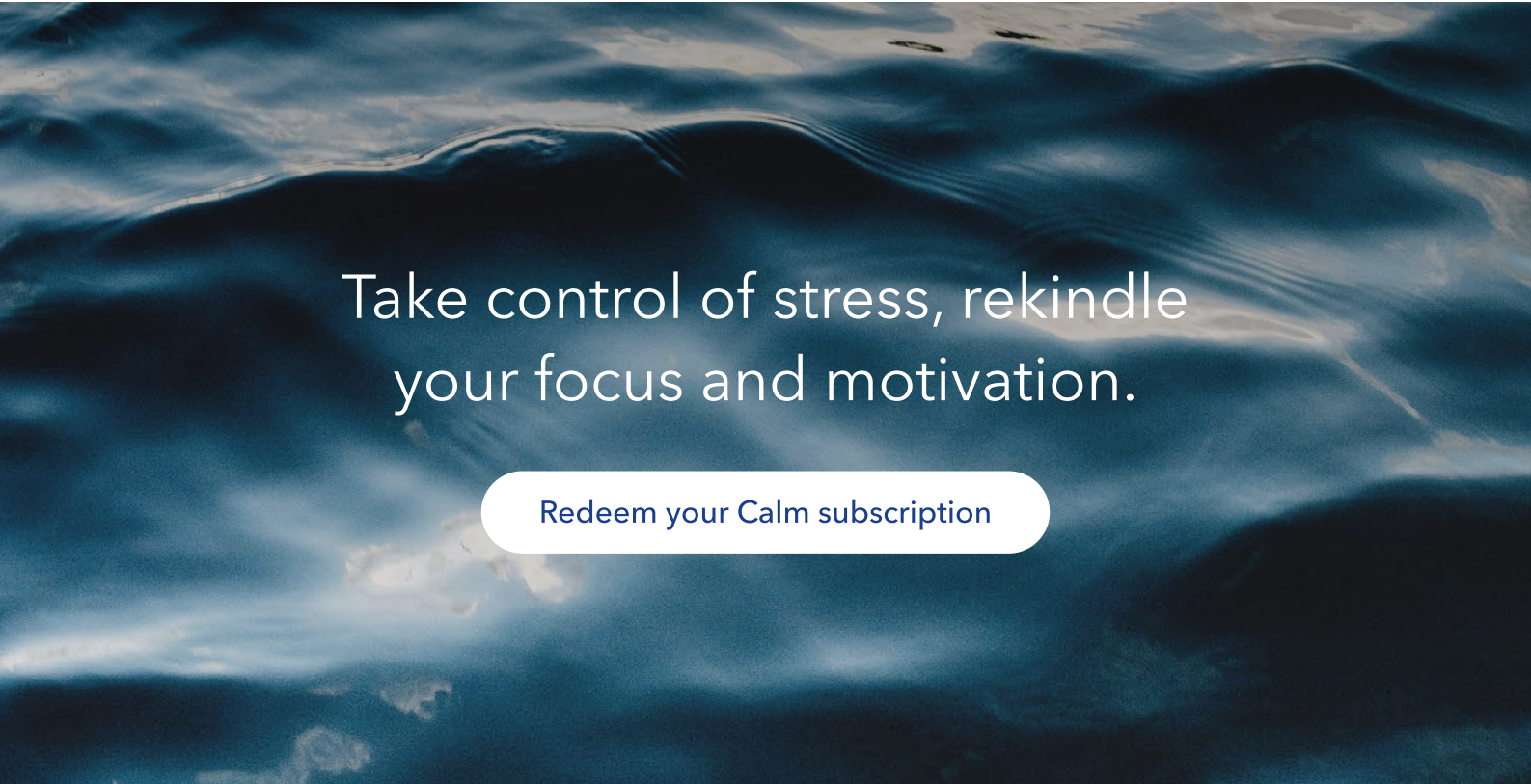
References

¹ Nesse, R.M., et al. "Evolutionary Origins and Functions of the Stress Response System." *Stress: Concepts, Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior*, 2016, pp. 95-101., <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-800951-2.00011-x>.

² "Understanding the Stress Response." *Harvard Health*, 6 July 2020, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>.

³ Smith, Melinda, et al. "Burnout Prevention and Treatment." *HelpGuide.org*, 23 Dec. 2021, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/burnout-prevention-and-recovery.htm#:~:text=The%20difference%20between%20stress%20and%20burnout&text=Stress%2C%20by%20and%20large%2C%20involves,hand%2C%20is%20about%20not%20enough>.

⁴ Maslach, Christina, et al. "Job Burnout." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2001, pp. 397-422., <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397>.



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