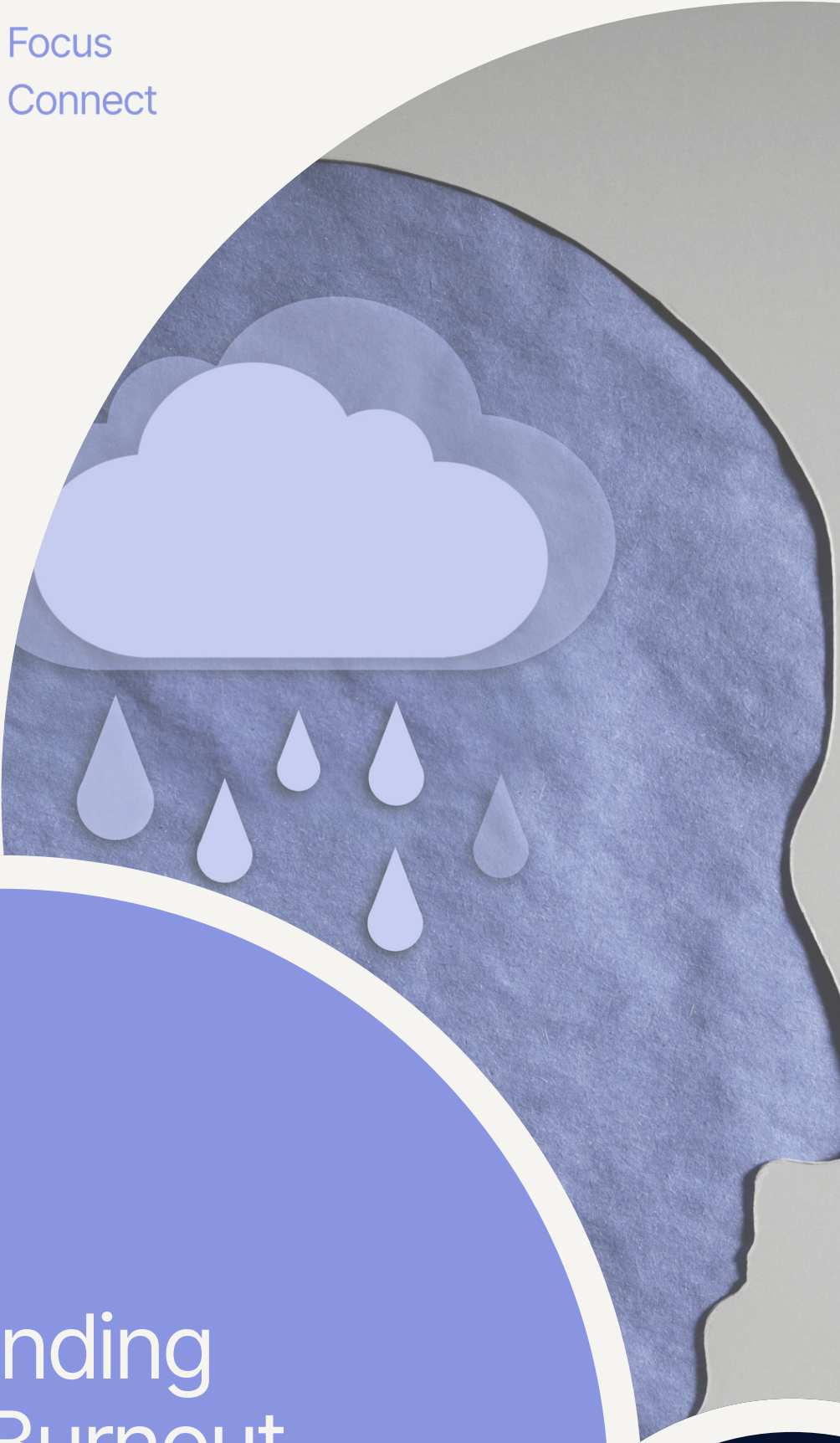




Understanding Stress & Burnout



Practical Strategies for Maintaining Wellbeing, Performance and Resilience

Stress is the body's natural physical and psychological response to increased pressure or demands.

Stress is not always harmful. In fact, a moderate level of pressure can help us stay motivated, focused and productive. However, when pressure becomes too high or continues for prolonged periods, it can begin to affect our wellbeing.

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion that can develop when we experience prolonged stress and feel unable to recover adequately.

Burnout is not a mental health condition, but it can significantly affect our wellbeing, performance and ability to cope with everyday demands.



Common Sources of Stress

Stress can come from many different areas of life, including:

- Work demands
- Relationships and family responsibilities
- Financial pressures
- Health concerns
- Life events and major changes

Work-related stressors may include:

- Time pressures
- High workloads
- Resource constraints
- Performance targets
- Poor management support
- Compassion fatigue
- Vicarious trauma



Stress is often temporary. Burnout tends to develop when high demands continue for long periods without sufficient recovery.



Recognising the Signs of Burnout

Burnout usually develops gradually over time. Recognising the early warning signs can help you take action before things become overwhelming.

Emotional Signs

- Irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Feeling trapped or hopeless
- Loss of motivation

Physical Signs

- Fatigue
- Frequent headaches
- Muscle tension
- Digestive difficulties
- Sleep disturbances
- Increased heart rate

Cognitive Signs

- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory problems
- Increased worry
- Racing thoughts
- Indecisiveness
- Reduced confidence

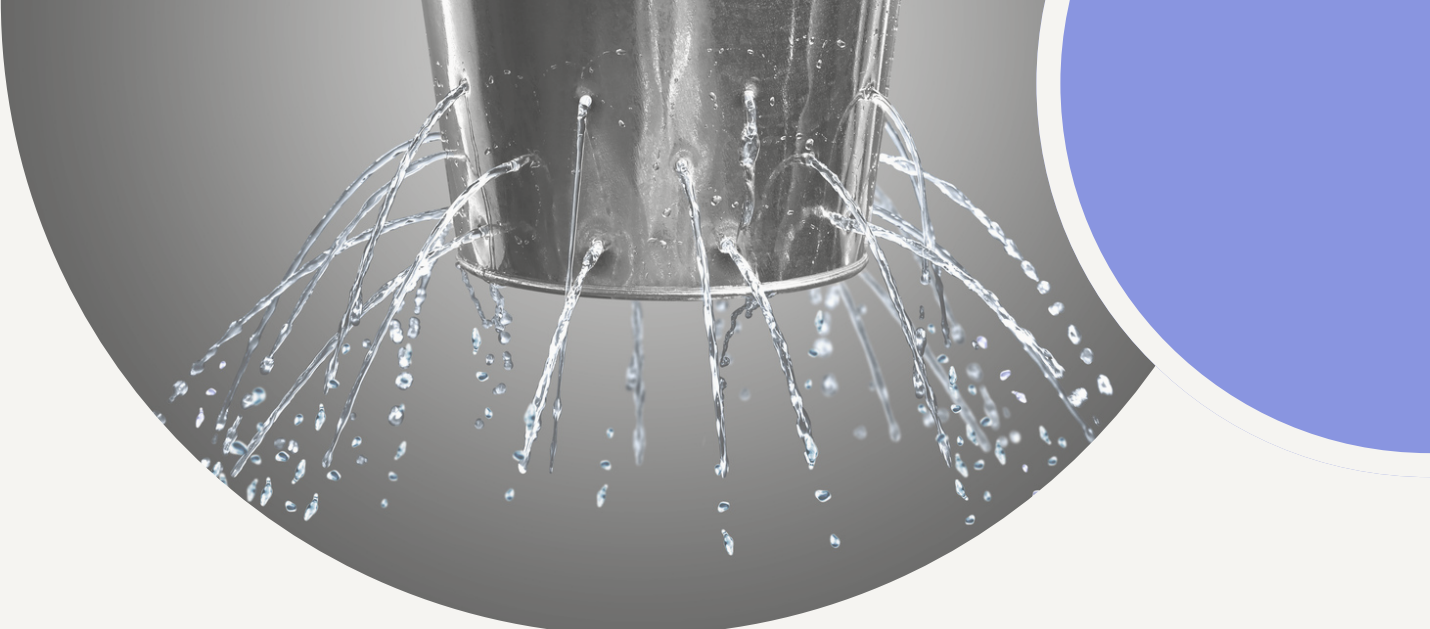
Behavioural Signs

- Withdrawal from others
- Avoiding activities
- Increased absenteeism
- Appetite changes
- Increased reliance on alcohol or other coping mechanisms

Ask Yourself:

“ Have I noticed these changes becoming more frequent or intense over time?

If so, it may be worth reviewing your workload, recovery and support. ”



Understanding Your Stress Bucket

A useful way of understanding stress is to think of it like a bucket.

Everyday pressures and demands add water into the bucket.

Healthy coping strategies help remove water from the bucket.

When too many demands build up without enough opportunities to recover, the bucket may begin to overflow.

What Adds Water to My Bucket?

Examples:

- Work pressures
- Deadlines
- Financial concerns
- Caring responsibilities
- Relationship difficulties
- Health worries

Beware of False Solutions

Some coping strategies may feel helpful in the short term but increase stress in the long run.

Examples include:

- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Avoiding problems
- Working longer hours
- Neglecting self-care

The aim is not to remove all stress. The aim is to prevent the bucket from overflowing.

What Removes Water from My Bucket?

Examples:

- Exercise
- Rest and recovery
- Supportive relationships
- Hobbies and interests
- Time outdoors
- Relaxation techniques



Preventing Burnout

Burnout is often easier to prevent than recover from.

Review Your Demands

Ask yourself:

- What is putting pressure on me right now?
- Which demands are within my control?
- What support could help?

Strengthen Recovery

Consider:

- Taking regular breaks
- Using annual leave
- Prioritising sleep
- Staying physically active
- Spending time with supportive people
- Doing things you enjoy

Build Healthy Boundaries

Examples include:

- Finishing work on time
- Managing expectations
- Limiting unnecessary overtime
- Taking lunch breaks
- Switching off work notifications outside work hours

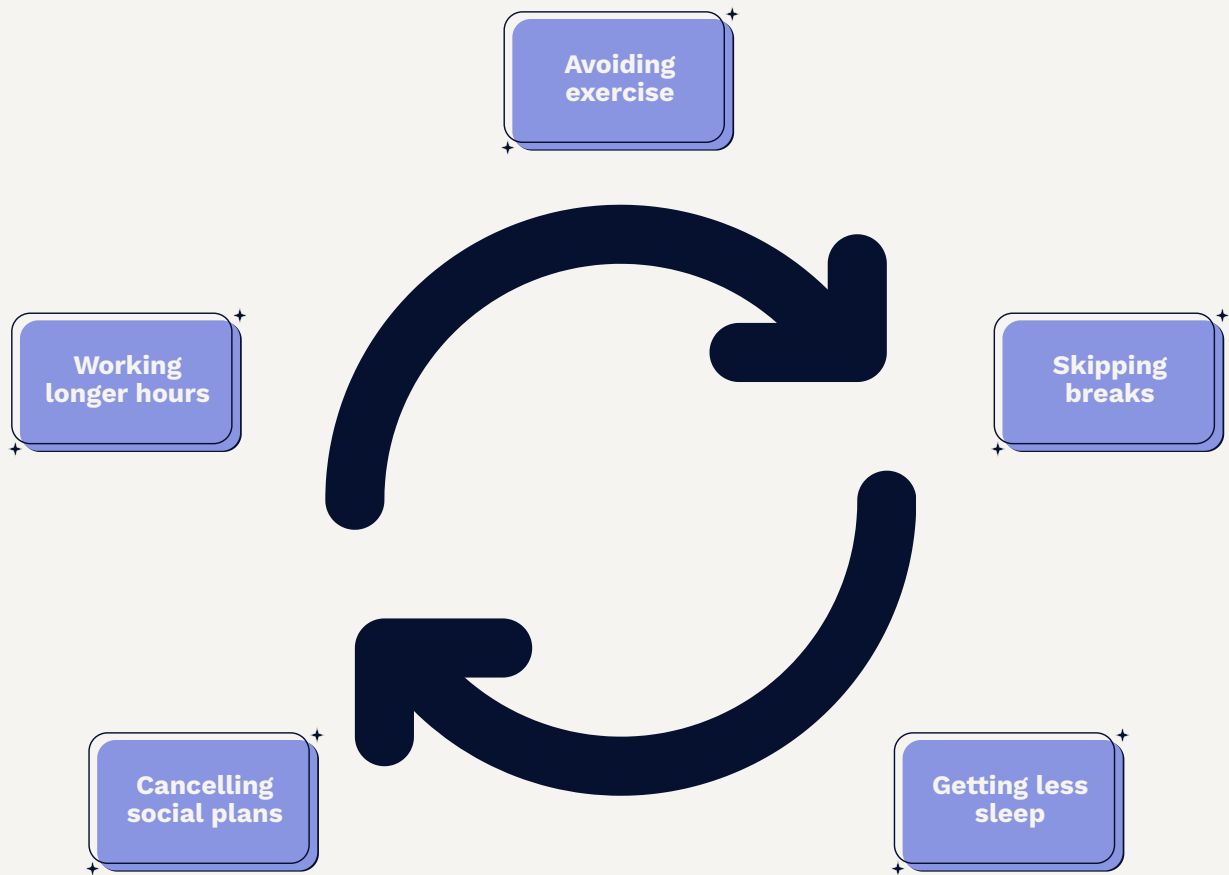
Remember:

Burnout develops gradually and recovery often works the same way. Small improvements made consistently can make a significant difference.



Breaking the Stress Cycle

Stress can create a cycle that becomes difficult to break.



These responses are understandable but can sometimes keep the cycle going.

“

Ask Yourself:

What is contributing to my current stress?
What am I doing that helps?

What am I doing that may unintentionally make things harder?

”



2. SELF CARE
3. SELF CARE

Looking After Yourself

During periods of pressure, wellbeing activities are often the first things we stop doing.

Unfortunately, they are often the things we need most.

Focus on the Basics

- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Social connection
- Rest and recovery
- Maintaining routines

Follow the Plan, Not the Mood

Motivation naturally fluctuates. Rather than waiting until you feel like doing something helpful, aim to follow simple wellbeing habits consistently.

Using a diary, planner or wellbeing action plan can help you stay on track.

Remember:

Small actions taken consistently are often more effective than major changes that are difficult to maintain.

Personal Burnout Prevention Plan

What are my biggest current sources of pressure?

What signs tell me I may be approaching burnout?

What helps me recover and recharge?

Who can I turn to for support?

One thing I will do differently after reading this guide:

Useful Resources

NHS Every Mind Matters

Practical advice and support for stress and wellbeing.

 www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters

Mind

Information and guidance on stress, burnout and workplace wellbeing.

 www.mind.org.uk

Mind Wellness Action Plan

A practical tool to help identify what keeps you well at work.

 www.mind.org.uk

TalkPlus Stress Workbook

Practical exercises for understanding and managing stress.

 www.talkplus.org.uk

Need Additional Support?

- Speak to your manager
- Contact HR or Occupational Health
- Access Focus Connect
- Contact your GP
- Self-refer to NHS Talking Therapies



Remember:

You do not need to wait until things become overwhelming before asking for help.

