



SELF-CARE FOR PROVIDERS

Health care providers are vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout. There are many red flags for secondary traumatic stress. Physical/behavioral indications include fatigue, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, headaches, upset stomach, chronic muscle tension, or sexual dysfunction. Emotional red flags include feeling overwhelmed/ emotionally spent, feeling helpless, feeling inadequate or vulnerable, increased mood swings, irritability, or suicidal or violent thoughts or urges. In treating abused patients, these issues can be especially problematic for providers who may have a trauma history themselves.

PREVALENCE

- 45% of resident physicians experience burnout. Physicians in family, internal, and emergency medicine are at greatest risk.
- 22% of physicians are estimated to experience burnout.

EFFECTS

- The effects of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress are decreased quality of care, increased medical errors, and poorer health outcomes.

INTERVENTIONS

Prevention of burnout is more beneficial than treatment, though cognitive behavioral therapy and relaxation techniques may be helpful treatment options. Consider:

- Awareness of emotional reactions and distress when confronting others' traumatic experiences.
- Connection with others by talking about reactions with trusted colleagues or others who will listen.
- Maintaining a balance between professional and personal lives, with a focus on self-care (e.g., relaxation, exercise, stress management, etc.) to prevent, and lessen the effects of, workplace stress.
- Other possible prevention strategies include:
 - ◇ Healthy, sensible nutrition
 - ◇ Adequate sleep
 - ◇ Foster connection to friends, family, and colleagues
 - ◇ Diversify tasks at work, or vary your caseload, to the extent that you can
 - ◇ Take breaks and use vacation days
 - ◇ Use relaxation techniques (e.g., deep breathing) as needed
 - ◇ Talk with colleagues about how your work affects you
 - ◇ Seek therapy if your work is negatively impacting your self-esteem, quality of life, or relationships



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RESOURCES

- <http://www.nlm.org/professional-development-programs/teaching-resources/ace-d/additional-resources/communicating-with-people-with-disabilities> — Health Care Toolbox provides information on self-care, tips, and strategies for health care providers.

REFERENCES

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