



Burnout: a fuller guide

What it is, what it looks like and what helps

What it is

The World Health Organization describes burn-out as an occupational phenomenon. It comes from chronic stress at work that has not been successfully managed. It is not a medical condition, and it is not a personal failing.

Three signs

- **Exhausted:** drained, physically and emotionally, in a way a weekend does not fix.
- **Detached:** flat, cynical or distant from work, patients or colleagues.
- **Self-doubt:** feeling less capable or effective at work.

How common it is

In a survey of 1,483 Australian dental practitioners, about 1 in 4 (24.8%) were classified as likely experiencing burnout (Hopcraft et al., 2023). The survey covered registered practitioners. Assistants and reception staff were not surveyed, so we know less about their experience.

How it differs from stress

Stress often feels like too much. Burnout often feels like running empty. They can overlap, and stress that goes on long enough can lead to burnout.

What helps you

- Protect time to recover: breaks, days off and sleep.
- Tell someone you trust how you are really going.
- Ask what could change at work, even one small thing.
- Get professional support if the signs last for weeks.

What helps a team

- Real breaks built into the day.
- Thanking people specifically, and often.
- Making it easy to speak up without being judged.
- Noticing changes, and checking in kindly.

Burnout comes from the work, so it also helps when the way the day runs changes, not only the person.

If you need support

Lifeline	13 11 14	24-hour crisis support
Beyond Blue	1300 22 4636	support by phone and online
Dental Practitioner Support	1800 377 700	registered practitioners; free, confidential, 24/7
In an emergency, call 000		

Look after yourself, and each other.

Sources: World Health Organization, ICD-11 (2019), burn-out as an occupational phenomenon. Hopcraft et al., Aust Dent J 2023;68(3):160-170, and J Public Health Dent 2023.