

Mental Health: Burnout Spectrum

Burnout is very common among farmers and is a fundamental crisis in the psychological connections that people establish with work, and is a combination of exhaustion, cynicism and lower efficacy. It can be triggered by many things but commonly includes agriculture policy, "media/ society's treatment of farming", the workload, and the unpredictability of the farming profession. Burnout over time results in a decline in work performance.

Burnout is commonly confused with stress, BUT they are two very different conditions. Stress is having too much on your plate; too much time spent working or too many responsibilities. Whereas burnout is the opposite.

Signs of Burnout

Symptoms of burnout can be further broken down into (1) social, (2) cognitive, (3) physical and (4) work symptoms:

- (1) **Social Symptoms:** withdrawing from others, cynicism about self, others, work, lowered frustration tolerance, interpersonal problems.
- (2) **Cognitive Symptoms:** difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness (both long and short term memories).
- (3) **Physical Symptoms:** elevated blood pressure, tightened muscles, exhaustion, loss of energy, getting sick more often and easier.
- (4) **Work Symptoms:** withdrawing from responsibilities, lack of motivation, feeling of failure, reduced sense of satisfaction or reward for hard work, sense of helplessness, lack of self-belief, generally decreased satisfaction, falling behind with an inability to catch up, sense of shame or failure, feeling helpless/ trapped/ defeated.

Stages of Burnout

Burnout will not present suddenly with an onset of symptoms but will instead slowly and gradually come on. If not corrected, it will continue to progress and worsen, making it difficult for you to complete your daily responsibilities.

Stage 1: Honeymoon Phase

Begins with energy, optimism and excitement for the new task or job. It is common to experience satisfaction that leads to periods of productivity.

Stage 2: Onset of Stress Phase

Soon the honeymoon phase ends and the levels of stress increase. Stress over time becomes more frequent. In this stage you may begin to note physical or mental signs such as loss of focus or productivity, and physical fatigue that can make it hard to sleep or enjoy activities outside of work.

Stage 3: Chronic Stress Phase

Stress is now becoming more persistent or chronic. As the pressure increases the stress may begin to impact your work leading to failure to complete tasks on time, arriving late for work or procrastination, and apathy. Socially you may withdraw, or lash out and be easily angered. These feelings may begin to impact your friends and family.

Stage 4: Burnout Phase

By this stage you have reached the tipping point to where you can no longer function as you normally would. Work problems consume you to the point of obsession, leading you to feel numb or with extreme self-doubt. Physical symptoms will begin to worsen including chronic headaches, stomach and gastrointestinal issues. Family and friends may notice your behavioral changes.

Stage 5: Habitual Burnout Phase

If left untreated, it will become part of your regular life and may lead to anxiety and depression. Chronic mental and physical fatigue will worsen and prevent you from working.

How to Recover

Burnout can be managed, but first you need to be honest with yourself. Until you recognize the problem,



it is difficult to move forward and correct it. Discuss your struggles with your coworkers/superiors to see if it is possible to readjust your workload and/or schedule to give yourself the time needed to recover and mentally unwind. It is critical to find ways to balance work and your personal life to prevent burnout in the future. This may be as simple as setting limitations and saying “no” to certain tasks.

If you are struggling with burnout and unsure of where to turn, speak with your family doctor or mental health provider to develop coping strategies.

Resources available to help

There are many people that can help, the organizations below have a variety of different resources available and people to talk to. If you are ever in doubt, please don't hesitate to contact us and we can help.

Mental Health Helpline 1-866-531-2600

Drug & Alcohol Helpline 1-800-565-8603

Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-9100

Ontario Suicide Prevention Network 1-416-670-4689

Crisis Service Canada 1-833-456-4566

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention www.suicideprevention.ca

Do More Agriculture Foundation www.domore.ag

Mental Health Line 211

Bell Let's Talk <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/get-help>

Farm and Food Care Ontario 1-519-837-1326 ext. 292

Canadian Mental Health Association <https://cmha.ca>

Ottawa Branch 613-737-7791

Cornwall Branch 613-933-5845

Dr. Jenn Reynen

Rideau St. Lawrence Veterinary Services