

Staff Burnout: Topic of the Month

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This Topic of the Month was written with University of Minnesota Public Health Nutrition (MPH) graduate student Gabriela Meraz-Fishbein.

Every day we help WIC families take steps toward healthier lives, yet we often forget to extend that same care to ourselves. Read this month's topic for tips to help you and your coworkers take care of yourselves when the demands of work start to feel heavy.



Taking care of you

When you are busy reminding participants about good nutrition, rest, and self-compassion, you may forget that these same messages apply to you. You can't pour from an empty cup, and more importantly, you deserve that same care you provide simply because you're human. Taking time to care for yourself isn't selfish; it's essential! It's what allows you to continue showing up for families with energy, empathy, and authenticity.

The Public Health Communications Collaborative and Information Futures Lab at Brown University co-created [Resilience: A Practical Guide for Public Health Communicators \(PDF\)](#) to offer trauma-informed strategies to public health professionals.

Recognizing early signs of burnout

Burnout can look different for every person. Here are early signs to keep an eye out for in yourself and coworkers.

- Feeling emotionally or physically exhausted.
- Irritability or reduced patience.
- Difficulty concentrating or staying engaged during appointments.
- Feeling disconnected from your work or team.
- Avoiding tasks that used to bring you joy.
- Experiencing changes in sleep, appetite, or mood.
- Feeling overwhelmed by small tasks and responsibilities.
- Lacking the energy to do your job well.
- Using food, drugs, or alcohol to improve your mood or to numb how you feel.

Get professional help when needed: If burnout is significantly impacting your mental or physical health, reach out to a healthcare provider, counselor, or employee assistance provider. Asking for help is a sign of strength and a key step in maintaining your wellbeing.

Practicing self-care

Self-care doesn't need to be elaborate and time intensive. Small, intentional habits throughout the day can help replenish your energy.

- Take short breaks between appointments.
- Keep water or a nourishing snack nearby.
- Practice mindfulness or deep breathing for a few minutes.
- Set boundaries when tasks begin to feel overwhelming.
- Create a calming routine after work; some ideas include journaling, reading, or stretching.
- Practice gratitude; say out loud or in your head one thing you are grateful for every day.
- Celebrate small wins. Reward yourself for just being you!

Practicing stress management

Try incorporating some of these strategies to manage stress and prevent burnout.

- **Seek connection:** Talking with coworkers can reduce feelings of isolation and offer perspective.
- **Use positive self-talk:** Remind yourself you are doing meaningful and impactful work.
- **Grounding:** Notice your five senses to help stay present. What do you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell?
- **Pause and breathe:** Take a minute to complete breathing exercises to help reset your nervous system.
 - [Breathing Exercises for Less Stress, More Energy.](#)

Movement

Movement supports your physical and mental wellbeing. Even small and consistent movements throughout the day add up.

- Try and engage in regular exercise that feels good to you.
- Stand up or stretch between appointments.
- Spend time outdoors when possible.
- Engage in social movement with friends and family.
- Invite a co-worker to take a quick walk.
 - Incorporate more movement at work: [50 Tips to Move More at Work \(PDF\)](#).

Nutrition

Fueling your body properly helps support energy, mood, and mental clarity.

- Eat balanced meals throughout the day. Focus on eating fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein.
- Keep quick protein and fiber-packed snacks at work. A balanced snack includes two food groups (carb + protein or protein + fat). Ideas include Greek yogurt with fruit, hummus with vegetables, cheese and whole grain crackers, etc.
- Stay hydrated; bring a water bottle to sip on throughout the day and refill as needed.

If possible, try and eat lunch away from your workspace for a true break. As a bonus, asking a co-worker to have lunch with you can be a great time to build a connection.

Seek support

No one should face burnout alone. Supportive conversations and connections with others can make a difference. Take care of yourself and your coworkers.

- Offer to listen to someone who may be struggling.
- Check in with a coworker about how they're doing.
- Ask for help when workloads feel heavy or unmanageable.
- Share strategies that help you feel grounded.
- Build small moments of team connection into your week.

Additional staff resource

Adultitis Intervention Video Series (PDF): A video series created for WIC staff looking to beat burnout. These short videos (5-8 minutes) may be used at any staff meeting or group event.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Access to these videos is for use solely by local WIC agencies for staff engagement. Please do not share these videos publicly.

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

Resilience: A Practical Guide for Public Health Communicators

(<https://publichealthcollaborative.org/communication-tools/resilience-a-practical-guide-for-public-health-communicators>)

Breathing Exercises for Less Stress, More Energy (<https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/4-breathing-techniques-for-better-health>)

50 Tips to Move More at Work

(https://uhs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/movemore_50tipsucb.pdf)

Adultitis Intervention Video Series

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/ce/videoseries.pdf>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St. N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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