



# Burnout Syndrome

## and the body of life force

*Burnout Syndrome is an experience of emotional and physical exhaustion experienced by about 25 % of the workforce according to statistics in the Netherlands and Germany. American physician and psychoanalyst, Herbert Freudenberger, in 1974 coined the term 'burn-out syndrome' as part of some groundbreaking research in the area.*

BY SAMANTHA KEEN

**C**haracteristic features of this syndrome are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and low personal accomplishment. People affected by the burn-out syndrome may suffer from depressive or anxious symptoms, from sleep disorders, chronic pain syndromes, or functional disorders of the cardiovascular or gastrointestinal system. Primary causes of the burnout syndrome are: high demand combined with low influence, a high level of engagement without sufficient rewards or gratification, and a low level of social support.

**SIGNS OF BURNOUT:**  
**Emotional exhaustion**  
**Physical exhaustion**  
**Unexplained ongoing illnesses such as 'flu**  
**Depression**  
**Insomnia**  
**Increased cynicism**  
**Quickness in blaming others**  
**Decrease in productivity**  
**Decrease in creativity**  
**Low morale**  
**Aloofness from work and people**

Burnout syndrome can also be seen as part of the broader trend of the changing nature of human beings. We used to be very much anchored in the land, and far less mental than we are

today. Now we get stressed and anxious much more frequently.

This increase in stress and worry has an affect on our life force and our vitality. Stress acts as a kind of 'grasping of' or drain upon the life force. This life force is also referred to as 'qi' in the area of Traditional Chinese Medicine and 'prana' in the Indian tradition of Ayurvedic medicine.

The word 'stress' was first used to refer to an emotional condition in 1942. Before that time, the word had only ever been used to describe the build-up of physical pressure between two pieces of metal or wood resting on each other, bearing weight.

The dictionary, [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com), describes stress as: "Hardship, adversity,

force, pressure, in part a shortening of French word, destresse (see distress), in part from French word, estrece 'narrowness, oppression', from the Latin strictus 'compressed', pp. of stringere 'draw tight' The purely psychological sense is attested from 1942".

Today, almost every chemist, health food shop and bookshop will have posters and information about dealing with stress. There are massage therapists, herbalists and meditation teachers who offer help for those who suffer from health problems that relate to stress.

### **BURNOUT AND LIFE FORCE**

Emotional and mental stress can contribute to physical health problems through their affect on the life force (qi), so we can seek techniques that really help us to change imbalances from the inside.

To explain how life force works within the whole human system, one model that I like to use is called 'Subtle bodies: a fourfold model' by Dr Samuel Sagan. Like any other map or model, this is a representative of reality and should serve only to help you understand reality. If you find that it does not work, throw it out and get another one. However, so far I have found this one extremely useful.

Sagan considers the human body in four parts. Much of the terminology of his model comes from the work of Rudolf Steiner, founder of the movement of anthroposophical medicine.

**Physical body:** The body that you live in every day. If you cut the physical body, you can often fix it by sewing it up with physical thread. There is a very good system that addresses the physical body – western medicine.

**Etheric Body:** This vehicle is otherwise known as qi, prana or life force. The etheric body is very well treated by techniques like acupuncture or Traditional Chinese Medicine, shiatsu or even some forms of martial arts like Tai Chi.

The etheric body permeates the physical body rather like water through a sponge. However, it is not exactly the same as the physical body and it does not have the same limits or boundaries as the physical body. The main experience of qi is usually in the form of vibration, or tingling or even movement of non-physical energy in this body.

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People tend to have experience of life force when they do some form of physical exercise and feel a release afterwards. Experiences of sexuality can often be quite energetic – many people can feel movements in their body of energy. Children are another example of easy-to-perceive etheric energy. They have a kind of buoyancy or flush that is full of life force.

**Astral Body:** In this model, this term is related to the mind, emotions, thoughts, or personality. It refers particularly to the mind as a separate vehicle to the brain or the body.

You might experience your mind as a separate part of you when you go to bed at night and you just can't stop thinking. You don't want to think any more, but the mind just goes on and on.

People also experience their mind as separate when they have a different experience of consciousness from normal. One experience is in meditation when your experience of yourself as a little separate from the body, and it is clear that thoughts are not you.

**Ego:** This is not the same as little ego as referred to by Freud. In this model, as in Rudolf Steiner's work, the term Ego can be loosely affiliated with the term Higher Self. In this context the Ego can be seen as an individual sense of spirituality or an eternal experience of yourself.

In practical terms this experience sometimes comes when you are in a quiet moment, such as when watching a sunset. Everything of your normal life just drops away. All those worries and thoughts and emotions are gone. In that moment of

peace or opening, there can be a sense of yourself across time – a feeling of timelessness.

Sometimes people have experiences like this when they are with a young child. Adults can easily pick up a baby and feel something of themselves that is quite different and open.

Occasionally when people fall in love, they access this part of themselves. They feel a sense of themselves that goes beyond all the ordinary cares of a life. They feel the real 'me' inside.

#### WHAT IS STRESS FOR OUR SUBTLE BODIES?

In terms of subtle bodies, stress is an experience of the astral or mental vehicle grasping the life force. When a person gets stressed, they often feel tight, tense, pain or heavy and tired. These are all symptoms of the mind grasping the life force. In this experience of stress there is also a blocking of the Ego or Higher Self, as the Astral body becomes predominant. That is why people sometimes feel depressed or overly emotional when they get too stressed. Their true nature is somehow clouded over or blocked out by the fog of the Astral body.

Many people decide to get out of the rat race in order to avoid stress or burnout. However, there are ways to keep moving towards more success-orientated lives and reduce this tension that causes burnout.

#### ETHERIC RHYTHMS

The life force is a vehicle of rhythms. Therefore sometimes people experience burnout when their body of life force has

lost its sense of support and connection with any kind of rhythm. That is why when working on regaining deeply depleted energy it can be great to take a nap every day even for 10-20 minutes at around the same time in the afternoon. This can be any time that suits an individual routine, but it can help a lot. In order to extend the benefit of this nap, it can be very useful to a meditative practice or relaxation practice that involves lying down, such as Yoga Nidra.

#### MEDITATION

Meditation works well to reduce the pressure of the astral body on the life force. When people close their eyes to sit still, the main aim of the exercise is to separate the mind or the astral vehicle from the etheric or the life force. When the astral body lifts up a little from the life force, and mental grasping starts to drop away, there is more room for the qi to flow and more room for a person to experience their Ego or Higher Self.

Many people over hundreds and probably even thousands of years have had the experience of observing their thoughts, while realising that they are more than their thoughts. Meditation that also works directly to build the qi or life force adds another dimension to this separation.

#### MARTIAL ARTS

There are some kinds of martial arts that aim to build the body of energy, such as Tai Qi, Qi Gong, Aikido and Shaolin Kung Fu. I have spoken to a number of people who recovered from the long term

illness Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) through working with these streams of martial arts.

#### EMOTIONAL RELEASE WORK

Since it is the mind that is grasping the life force, some people may find relief through undoing some old emotional wounds that have caused habitual mental grasping. We all know that things which happened in the past tend to haunt us today, even if we have not been fully aware of them. Techniques such as rebirthing and emotional regression can work very deeply in changing the balance between the life force and the vehicle of the mind or the astral body.

#### TIME SPENT IN NATURE

One of the greatest assets we have is the Earth. Indeed, our life force is not totally separate from the Earth. That is why individual's life force draws deep nourishment and grounding from nature. Therefore, time outside in nature can be extremely regenerative. Sometimes, a weekly walk in the bush or a day on the beach can give the life force a much-needed boost. This could be recommended for prevention of burnout and stress.



*Samantha Keen is a freelance journalist and writer who is passionate about meditation and transforming her energetic body. She is currently studying at the Clairvision School of meditation, as well as writing a book about recovering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS).*

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