

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Stress & Burnout Recovery Kit

Find out where your energy is going, catch burnout before it catches you, and build a week that doesn't run on empty.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- Understand what burnout actually is (and how it differs from stress)
- A burnout self-check across the three classic warning zones
- A stress-signals body map — learn your earliest alarms
- An energy audit: what drains you vs. what refills you
- A recovery menu of 24 research-informed ways to recharge
- A weekly workload planner and an early-warning action plan

A printable self-help kit based on stress-science and cognitive behavioral (CBT) principles.

How to Use This Kit

Welcome. If you are running on fumes — tired before the day starts, snappish with people you love, staring at tasks that used to be easy — you are not lazy and you are not failing. You are likely somewhere on the road between stress and burnout, and there is a way back. This kit helps you find where you are, what is draining you, and what actually refills you.

Getting started

1. **Print what you need.** The whole kit or single pages. Tracking and planner pages are meant to be reprinted weekly.
2. **Start with the education pages.** Burnout has a specific shape. Recognizing it turns "what is wrong with me?" into "oh — that's what this is."
3. **Do the self-check honestly.** Nobody grades it. It only works if you answer as you are, not as you wish you were.
4. **Map your body's signals.** Your body usually knows you are overloaded weeks before your calendar admits it.
5. **Audit your energy for one normal week.** The drains-and-deposits pages show you where the leaks are. You cannot budget energy you have not counted.
6. **Plan the next week differently.** Use the workload planner and recovery menu together: subtract one drain, schedule two deposits. Small, repeatable, real.

A few gentle reminders

- Recovery is not one great vacation. It is small deposits, made often, that outpace the withdrawals.
- Rest is not a reward you earn after the work is done. It is part of how the work gets done.
- These tools are self-help, not therapy or medical care. Burnout overlaps with depression and some medical conditions — if your exhaustion is severe, persistent, or comes with hopelessness, please see a qualified professional. That is not defeat; that is maintenance.

I am starting this kit on (date):

On a scale of 0-10, my tank right now is at:

One thing I hope will feel different:

Understanding Burnout

Part 1: Stress vs. Burnout — Different Problems, Different Fixes

Stress and burnout get used as synonyms. They are not — and the difference matters, because the repairs are different.

Stress: too much, too fast

Stress is a state of **over-activation**. Too many demands, not enough time — but underneath, you still believe that if you could just catch up, you'd be okay. Stress is urgent, keyed-up, and often temporary.

Feels like: racing mind, tight deadlines, working late, trouble switching off — but caring, still caring a lot.

The repair for stress is mostly *less and slower*: reducing load, completing the stress cycle (movement, rest, connection), and letting your body come down.

Burnout: too much, too long

Burnout is what happens when high stress runs for months without enough recovery. It is a state of **depletion** — and it has three classic dimensions, first described in workplace research:

1. **Exhaustion.** Not "tired" — *drained*. Sleep doesn't seem to fix it. Everything costs more energy than it should.
2. **Cynicism and distance.** You stop caring about things you used to care about. People become irritating. Work becomes "whatever." This is not a character flaw — it is your mind's emergency brake, trying to cut spending.
3. **Reduced sense of effectiveness.** You feel like you're doing worse at everything, accomplishing less, doubting your own competence.

Feels like: flat, foggy, detached, going through the motions, dreading things that used to be fine.

The repair for burnout is deeper: restoring energy on purpose, renegotiating the demands that caused the bleed, and rebuilding the sense that what you do matters.

Why this distinction helps

If you treat burnout like stress ("push through, it's just a busy season"), you dig the hole deeper. If you treat stress like burnout, you may overhaul a life that mostly needed a weekend and a walk. The self-check on the next pages helps you tell which one you're in.

Reading the two descriptions — which one sounds more like my last month?

Understanding Burnout

Part 2: The Stress Cycle — Why Removing the Stressor Isn't Enough

Here is the piece most of us were never taught: **dealing with the stressor and dealing with the stress are two separate jobs.**

You can finish the project, survive the difficult meeting, get the kids to bed — and your body can *still* be carrying the stress chemicals the situation produced. The stressor ended. The stress didn't. Do that daily for months and the leftover stress compounds into the exhaustion you now carry.

Completing the cycle

Your stress response is a physical event, so it needs a physical ending. Research on stress points to a handful of reliable "cycle completers":

- **Movement** — the single most efficient one. A brisk walk, dancing in the kitchen, 20 squats, a bike ride. Your body burns through the stress chemistry the way it was designed to: by moving.
- **Breathing** — long, slow exhales for a minute or two downshift your nervous system.
- **Real connection** — a warm conversation, a long hug, laughing until it stops being polite. Signals of safety tell your body the emergency is over.
- **Crying** — sometimes the body finishes the cycle on its own, if you let it.
- **Creating** — cooking, gardening, music, making anything with your hands.
- **Rest and sleep** — the repair crew. Nothing else works well without it.

The key: something physical has to tell your body "you are safe now." Your calendar can't do it. Only your body can.

The daily close-out

The most practical habit in this kit: a 10-20 minute "cycle completer" between your demands and your evening — a walk after the last meeting, music while cooking, stretching before bed. Think of it as closing the day's tabs so they stop running in the background.

What already works for me? When was the last time I felt stress actually *leave* my body — and what was I doing?

You can't always control the demands. You can almost always complete the cycle. That's the lever you own.

Burnout Self-Check

An honest snapshot across the three warning zones

How to use it: for each statement, rate how often it has been true over the **last month**: 0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = almost always. Answer as you are, not as you'd like to be.

Zone 1: Exhaustion

Statement	My score (0-3)
I wake up tired, even after a full night's sleep	
By mid-afternoon I have very little left	
Small tasks feel like they cost more energy than they should	
I run on caffeine, sugar, or willpower to get through the day	
Weekends and days off don't seem to recharge me anymore	

Zone 1 total:

Zone 2: Cynicism and distance

Statement	My score (0-3)
I care less about my work or responsibilities than I used to	
I feel irritated by people more easily than before	
I catch myself going through the motions, just getting through	
I avoid people, messages, or tasks because I have nothing left	
Things that used to feel meaningful now feel like items on a list	

Zone 2 total:

Zone 3: Effectiveness

Statement	My score (0-3)
I doubt the quality of my work more than I used to	
I have trouble concentrating or making decisions	
I accomplish less than before, even when I work more	
I feel like whatever I do, it barely makes a difference	
I've stopped feeling proud of things I finish	

Zone 3 total:

Reading your snapshot

- **Mostly 0-1s (totals under ~6 per zone):** you're stressed but resourced — protect what's working.
- **A zone at 7+:** that zone is asking for attention. Exhaustion high? Prioritize the recovery menu and non-negotiables. Cynicism high? Look at the drains audit — something is bleeding you. Effectiveness high? Be gentle with self-judgment; it recovers last.
- **All three zones high:** please take this seriously — you deserve real support, possibly including a professional. This kit can help; it should not have to help alone.

Note : "This is a self-reflection tool, not a diagnostic test. Exhaustion with persistent low mood or hopelessness deserves a professional conversation."

Stress-Signals Body Map

Your body sounds the alarm before your mind admits it

Stress is physical long before it is obvious. Jaw first for some people; stomach, shoulders, or sleep for others. Knowing *your* pattern gives you an early-warning system — the point of this page is to catch the signal while it is still a whisper.

How to use it: think about your last stretch of high stress. Where did it show up in your body? Mark the map, then describe each signal below.

My signals, from first to loudest

My earliest signal (the whisper):

My mid-stage signals (the talking voice):

My overload signals (the siren):

Common signals, if you need a starting list

Body	Mood and behavior
tight jaw or grinding, headaches, stiff neck and shoulders, stomach knots or appetite changes, chest tightness, shallow breathing, fatigue, getting sick more often, restless sleep	short fuse, tearfulness, numbness, doom-scrolling, snacking or drinking more, cancelling plans, procrastinating, double-checking everything, waking at 3 am with a racing mind

My response plan

When I notice my earliest signal, my first move will be (pick something from the Recovery Menu):

The earlier the signal, the cheaper the fix. A whisper needs a walk. A siren needs a week.

Energy Audit — Part 1: The Drains

You cannot budget energy you haven't counted

For one normal week, notice what takes energy *out*. Not just big things — the sneaky ones too: the friend who only calls to complain, the 47 open browser tabs, the meeting that could have been an email, the clutter on the counter.

How to use it: add drains as you notice them through the week. Rate the cost, then mark whether you can change it.

The drain log

What drained me	Energy cost (1-5)	How often?	Can I change it? (Yes / Somewhat / No)

Reading your drains

- **High cost + frequent + changeable** = your leverage points. Start there.
- **High cost + not changeable** (caregiving, a diagnosis, this season of life) = these need *compensation*, not guilt. More deposits, not more discipline.
- **Low cost but constant** — papercut drains add up. Batch them, automate them, or drop them.

My top three leaks

Leak 1:

Leak 2:

Leak 3:

Tip box: "Look for drains wearing a disguise: obligations you agreed to years ago, standards nobody actually requires, and 'quick favors' that repeat weekly."

Energy Audit — Part 2: The Deposits

What actually refills you (not what should)

Deposits are personal. Gardening restores one person and exhausts another. Scrolling feels like rest but usually returns pennies. This page finds *your* real deposits — the activities that leave you with more than they took.

How to use it: through the same week, note what gave energy back. Rate the recharge honestly — including the fake rest that didn't.

The deposit log

What I did	Recharge (1-5)	Time it took	Worth repeating? (Yes / No)

The honest math

This week, my biggest real deposits were:

The 'fake rest' that returned less than it promised (scrolling, background TV, revenge bedtime...):

Roughly, my week was (check one): ☐ More drains than deposits ☐ About even ☐ More deposits than drains

The rebalance

Next week I will subtract this ONE drain:

And schedule these TWO deposits (with day and time): 1.

Burnout is rarely fixed by adding more rest to an unchanged week. It's fixed by changing the week: one drain out, two deposits in, repeat.

The Recovery Menu

24 research-informed ways to recharge — pick by the time you actually have

Recovery isn't one big fix; it's a menu you order from daily. Check what you've tried. Star what works for you. When you're depleted, don't think — look at your stars.

Micro (2-10 minutes) — between tasks, in the car, anywhere

- ☐ Step outside and take 10 slow breaths, exhale longer than inhale
- ☐ Brisk walk around the block (the fastest cycle-completer there is)
- ☐ Stretch your neck, shoulders, and jaw — the stress trio
- ☐ Drink a glass of water slowly, away from every screen
- ☐ Put on one song that changes your state — and actually listen
- ☐ Write down the three things circling your mind (close the tabs)

Daily (15-45 minutes) — the maintenance dose

- ☐ Movement you don't hate: walk, bike, swim, dance, stretch
- ☐ A real lunch break — food without a screen
- ☐ 20 minutes of something with your hands: cooking, gardening, fixing, making
- ☐ A genuine conversation with someone who feels easy
- ☐ A shower or bath taken slowly, as a reset — not a pit stop
- ☐ Lights-down wind-down before bed (sleep is the master deposit)

Weekly (1-3 hours) — the deeper refill

- ☐ A half-day with nothing scheduled — protected like a meeting
- ☐ Time in nature: trail, park, water, anywhere green or blue
- ☐ Something that absorbs you completely: sport, music, craft, game night
- ☐ Seeing a person who gives energy instead of taking it
- ☐ A no-obligations morning: slow coffee, no alarm, no plan
- ☐ Doing something for someone else, freely chosen (giving refills, when it's chosen)

Deep (when the tank is truly low)

- ☐ A full day offline — phone in a drawer, world survives
- ☐ Saying no to one recurring commitment for a season
- ☐ A weekend that is actually restful, not a chore marathon in disguise
- ☐ Asking for real help: delegating, splitting a load, hiring it out if you can
- ☐ A conversation with a professional about how you're really doing

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- ☐ Sleep, protected fiercely, for a full week — same bedtime, no exceptions

My starred five

When I'm running low, I will reach for these first:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Weekly Workload Planner

Plan the week around your capacity, not your guilt

Most overload isn't laziness or bad time management — it's planning a 60-hour week into 40 hours of capacity, then feeling like a failure for the math. This planner makes the math visible *before* the week starts.

Week of:

My honest capacity this week (0-10), given sleep, health, and life:

Step 1: Sort the demands

MUST happen this week	SHOULD happen (but survivable if not)	COULD happen (only if energy allows)

The rule: if your capacity is 6/10 or lower, the COULD column is closed this week — and one SHOULD moves to next week. Capacity 4 or lower? Only MUSTs survive.

Step 2: Protect the deposits

My two scheduled deposits this week (from my Recovery Menu, with day + time):

1.

2.

My daily cycle-completer (10-20 min, same time daily works best):

Step 3: Pre-decide the drops

If the week goes sideways, the first thing I will drop — guilt-free, already decided:

The person I will tell / ask for help if I'm sinking:

End-of-week review (2 minutes, honestly)

Did the MUSTs happen? What actually broke, if anything?

Did I protect the deposits — and what did they change?

A sustainable week is not one where everything got done. It's one you could repeat next week without borrowing from your health.

My Early-Warning Action Plan

Decide now what future-you will do at each alarm level

By the time burnout is loud, decision-making is exactly what you don't have energy for. So decide now, while you have some. This page turns your body map and self-check into a simple if-then plan.

Green zone — resourced

I know I'm in green when... (energy, mood, sleep):

To stay here, my weekly minimums are (sleep hours, movement, deposits):

Yellow zone — the whisper

My yellow flags (from my body map — earliest signals):

IF I notice them, THEN within 48 hours I will: (one menu item + one drain to pause):

Orange zone — the talking voice

My orange flags (mid-stage signals, cynicism creeping in):

IF I hit orange, THEN this week I will: (close the COULD column, drop one SHOULD, schedule a deep deposit, tell someone):

Red zone — the siren

My red flags (overload signals, all three zones high):

IF I hit red, THEN I will: (who I tell, what I cancel, when I book professional support):

The person who is allowed to tell me I've hit orange or red, even if I argue:

This plan works because it removes the hardest part of burnout — having to make good decisions while depleted. You already made them. Now you just follow your own instructions.

Pocket Recovery Cards

Cut them out. Keep them close.

For the days the to-do list starts making the decisions. Cut along the dashed lines. Desk, wallet, fridge, bathroom mirror.

<i>"Dealing with the task and dealing with the stress are two different jobs. Have I done the second one today?"</i>	<i>"Rest is not a reward for finishing. It is part of how things get finished."</i>
<i>"I can't pour from an empty cup — and refilling it is nobody's job but mine."</i>	<i>"A 10-minute walk now is cheaper than a lost week later."</i>
<i>"My worth is not my output. It never was."</i>	<i>"Tired is a signal, not a character flaw. Signals get answered, not argued with."</i>

Cut along the dashed lines.

Weekly Recovery Reflection

Five minutes that keep the tank from quietly draining again

Use this page once a week — print a fresh copy each time. Burnout creeps back through weeks nobody was watching. This is the watching.

Week of:

1. The gauges

My energy this week, on average (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My sleep, honestly (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Which zone was I mostly in? (check one): ☐ Green ☐ Yellow ☐ Orange ☐ Red

2. This week's recovery moments (check all that apply)

- ☐ I completed the stress cycle most days (movement, breath, connection)
- ☐ I took a real break most days (not fake rest)
- ☐ I protected at least one scheduled deposit
- ☐ I dropped or delegated something on purpose
- ☐ I said no to protect my capacity
- ☐ I asked for help or told someone how I'm really doing

3. Reflection prompts

My biggest drain this week — and is it shrinkable next week?

My best deposit this week — what made it work?

One early signal my body sent — and how fast I answered it:

4. Next week

One drain out:

Two deposits in (day + time):

My honest capacity next week looks like (0-10):

You don't recover once. You recover weekly, in small deliberate deposits — until one day you notice the tank is just... full more often than not.

A Closing Note

If you've worked through these pages, you now know things most exhausted people never get told: that stress and burnout are different problems, that the stress cycle needs a physical ending, that your body warns you early, and that recovery is arithmetic — deposits versus drains — not a personality test.

A few things to carry forward:

- **Keep the daily cycle-completer.** Ten minutes, most days, beats a perfect week once a year.
- **Re-run the energy audit whenever life shifts** — new job, new baby, new season. The leaks move.
- **Trust your early-warning plan.** You wrote it resourced; follow it depleted. Future-you does not need to renegotiate it at 11 pm on a bad Tuesday.
- **Watch the pattern, not the day.** Anyone can have an empty Wednesday. Three empty weeks is a signal — answer it.

And if the exhaustion stays heavy no matter what you deposit — or the flatness starts to look like hopelessness — please bring in a professional. Some tanks have leaks that need more than a workbook, and finding that out is wisdom, not failure.

You are allowed to be a person, not a performance. Rest like it.

The most important thing I learned about my energy:

The one habit from this kit I commit to keeping:

Please Read: Important Information

About this kit

This kit is an educational self-help resource. It shares general information and skills drawn from widely used stress-management, recovery, and cognitive behavioral (CBT) approaches.

It is not psychotherapy, counselling, medical care, or mental health treatment. Using this kit does not create a therapist-client or any other professional relationship with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

One important caution: persistent exhaustion can have medical causes (thyroid conditions, anemia, sleep disorders, and others), and burnout overlaps with depression. If your fatigue is severe or long-lasting, if rest never helps, or if flatness comes with hopelessness or losing interest in nearly everything — please see your doctor or a mental health professional. That is the strong move, not the weak one.

Everyone's situation is different. If workload stress is significantly affecting your health, sleep, or relationships, a qualified professional can help you find options a workbook cannot.

If you need help now

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call or text 988** — free, confidential, available 24/7

United States — Crisis Text Line

- Text **HOME** to **741741** (24/7)

Canada — Kids Help Phone (for young people)

- Call **1-800-668-6868** or text **CONNECT** to **686868** (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out.

Content was developed with the assistance of AI tools and reviewed for general accuracy; it reflects widely accepted psychoeducational principles rather than individualized advice.