



## Avoiding Physician Burnout

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Being constantly on the go. Having other people's lives in your hands. Navigating the complexities of health insurance. It's not just one stress factor but multiple pressure points that build up and lead to physician burnout.

Recognizing the risk factors is a great first step toward preventing it. "A doctor can stop burnout just by being aware of it before it gets out of hand," says Deidre Devier, PhD, associate professor of neurology at Louisiana State University, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology, master's degree in social work, and doctorate in experimental psychology.

### Recognize stress factors

Limited time is a common stress factor among physicians. "With doctors having more pressure to see more patients a day, there is the risk of burnout from trying to treat patients decently and meet a quota," Dr. Devier says.

Lacking sufficient support staff is another common source of stress. "You sometimes see

physicians having to do so much paperwork that they shouldn't be doing," she says. "Medical institutions can lose doctors to burnout this way."

Physicians working with patients with neuromuscular disease face additional stress factors that may put them at higher risk for burnout. "How do you think it feels to have patients who sometimes have very few treatment options and to see what they go through?" Dr. Devier asks. "Seeing patients getting worse over time can cause a helpless feeling."

Neuromuscular disease physicians often are very involved with helping family members and caregivers care for their patients. This supportive role — which goes beyond a strict definition of patient care but is so crucial for those with neuromuscular diseases — can create an added burden.

## Follow your own good advice

To fight burnout, physicians can learn to be good patients. "Doctors tell patients to take care of their health, but they don't always follow their own advice," Dr. Devier says. "It's important to take the time to exercise, eat right, and have time away from work to recharge. They sometimes feel that doing these things is selfish and takes away from patients, but they can't serve their patients at all if they burn out."

It's also important to maintain a good support system — and don't be afraid to lean on it when you're feeling stress, hopelessness, or frustration. "Doctors often feel it's a weakness to admit signs of stress," Dr. Devier says. "But doctors who can be honest with each other and help each other through tough times can gain strength that way."

## Look for signs of burnout

Having trouble sleeping, feeling unfocused at work, and being short-tempered are common signs of burnout. If you recognize these signs early, you have a better chance of stopping it before it gets out of control.

"Recognize when you're not at your best, and take a step back if you need to," Dr. Devier says. "Doctors want to be strong for everyone, but you need to stand up for yourself. Remember, you can't help the profession if you end up leaving it."