

— SHAPING DESTINY —
Transforming How We Live, Love & Lead

BURNOUT RECOVERY GUIDE

10 Signs You Are Running on Empty

A complete, evidence-based companion for recognising and recovering from burnout and an introduction to how Shaping Destiny supports sustainable recovery.

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Before You Begin

We wrote this guide because so many of the people who come to us say some version of the same thing: “I know I'm exhausted. I just don't know how to actually rest anymore.”

That's the strange thing about burnout because by the time it becomes visible, simply resting rarely fixes it. The body has been running on urgency for so long that stopping can feel almost as uncomfortable as continuing.

This guide is a way of understanding what's actually happening when you burn out, and some practical, evidence-based ways to recover properly, not just temporarily. This isn't a guide about doing less for a week and hoping it holds.

Toward the end of this guide, we have also included an honest look at what working with us actually involves, so you know exactly what to expect if you ever want more support than a guide can give.

- The Shaping Destiny Team

Why Burnout Feels Different Now

Your body isn't broken. It is still bracing for a threat that never fully switched off.

The stress response was built for short bursts; a genuine threat, a surge of cortisol and adrenaline, then recovery. Modern working life rarely offers that recovery window. Deadlines, notifications and always-on availability keep the same system activated for months or years at a time, a state researchers call allostatic load: the cumulative wear of a stress response with nowhere to discharge.

Layer on a culture that treats exhaustion as a badge of commitment, and rest as something to be earned rather than needed, and it becomes easier to see why burnout so often arrives disguised as diligence, sometimes right up until the body simply stops cooperating.

WORTH REMEMBERING

— *Burnout is a predictable response to an unsustainable amount of demand, sustained for too long without recovery. Burnout isn't a personal failure to cope.*

Recognising When You Are Running on Empty

Burnout rarely announces itself. More often, it accumulates quietly enough to feel normal.

PHYSICAL

01 You wake up tired, however long you slept.

PHYSICAL

02 Your body is speaking: headaches, tension, sleep or gut issues.

EMOTIONAL

03 Wins and achievements no longer register.

EMOTIONAL

04 Your patience has a noticeably shorter fuse.

COGNITIVE

05 You are present in the room, but not really there.

COGNITIVE

06 You have caught yourself thinking, “what’s the point?”

BEHAVIOURAL

07 You have quietly dropped the things that used to recharge you.

BEHAVIOURAL

08 You are running on caffeine, willpower and deadlines alone.

REFLECT

- Which of these have been true for more than two weeks, not just today?
- What would you have to admit if you stopped attributing this to a “busy patch”?

Why Rest Alone Doesn't Fix Exhaustion

A weekend off can quiet the symptoms. It rarely touches the cause.

Burnout goes beyond just physical tiredness. It is the result of a prolonged mismatch between what's demanded of you and what you have to give, often held in place by patterns like over-responsibility, perfectionism, or difficulty setting limits. Real recovery means addressing both: the depleted body, and the beliefs that keep depleting it.

- 1 Rising Demand**
More is asked of you than you can sustainably give at work, at home, or both.
- 2 Depleted Reserves**
Energy, focus and patience begin running low, but the demands don't ease.
- 3 Disengagement**
You start withdrawing from tasks, people, even yourself, to protect what's left.
- 4 Diminished Capacity**
With less in reserve, the next demand lands harder, and the cycle repeats.

TRY THIS

Notice the Pattern

For the next two weeks, track one thing each evening: your energy on a scale of one to five, and what you did to recover, if anything. Patterns, not single hard days tell you whether you are in the cycle, and where.

CBT & ACT-Based Recovery Strategies

- 1 Thought Audits**
Notice thoughts like “I should be doing more,” and test whether they're fact or fear talking.
- 2 Values-Based Action**
Choose one task each day based on what matters to you, and not simply what's loudest.
- 3 Cognitive Defusion**
Practise observing a stressful thought as just a thought, without obeying it immediately.
- 4 Behavioural Activation**
Reintroduce one enjoyable, low-effort activity this week, regardless of how small it feels.

BEFORE YOU PUSH THROUGH AGAIN

- *Is this urgent, or does it just feel urgent because I am depleted?*
- *What would I tell a friend in my exact situation?*

A CLIENT'S STORY

Composite Case Study: Learning to Stop

The following is a composite scenario drawn from common patterns we see in our work. It does not describe any real individual.

Daniel came to us the way a lot of people do: not in crisis, but in a kind of low hum of exhaustion he had stopped noticing. He had been “fine” for so long that fine had quietly become his baseline and reflecting elsewhere. He was tired on waking, short with his kids, unable to remember the last thing he had done purely for enjoyment.

The turning point wasn't dramatic. A missed deadline, ordinary by most standards, left him unable to get out of bed the next morning, not from illness, but from a body that had simply stopped agreeing to keep going.

What changed first wasn't his workload, but his relationship to it. A single, small refusal such as declining a call that could easily wait until Monday became the first evidence that the world didn't end when he stopped saying yes to everything. Recovery, for Daniel, was less about a dramatic life overhaul and more about slowly re-learning that rest didn't have to be earned first.

REFLECT

Where in your week is “fine” quietly doing the work that “struggling” should be doing instead?

Where Burnout Shows Up

Burnout doesn't look the same on everyone. It tends to follow the shape of what you're already carrying.

WORKPLACE

Overworking has become invisible because it's consistently rewarded.

“Track your hours like a boundary, not a virtue.”

CAREGIVING

Everyone else's needs have quietly outranked your own for months.

“Your capacity to care for others depends on not running on empty yourself.”

PARENTING

There's no clock-out time, and no one to hand it off to.

“Ten minutes alone, protected daily, is maintenance and not indulgence.”

HIGH ACHIEVERS

Slowing down feels like falling behind, or like failure.

“Rest is not the opposite of ambition. Rather, it is what makes it sustainable.”

Daily Wellbeing Habits

Small, Repeatable Habits

- ◇ Protect one screen-free hour, every single day.
- ◇ Name one feeling before you reach for one fix.
- ◇ Take a ten-minute walk, phone left behind.
- ◇ Say no once a day - on purpose, not by accident.
- ◇ Close the day by naming one thing that went right.

EXERCISE

Build a Recovery Menu

Make a list of things that reliably restore you; not what should, what actually does. A walk, silence, a specific person, ten minutes doing nothing productive. Keep it visible somewhere you'll see it on the days you're too depleted to remember it exists.

Reflective Questions Worth Sitting With

Recovery often starts with an honest look at what you've been normalising.

- 01** *What have you been calling “just tired” that's actually lasted for months?*
 - 02** *What would you have to give up believing about yourself to actually rest?*
 - 03** *Who benefits from you staying this busy, and is it really you?*
 - 04** *What did “success” look like growing up, and does it still fit the life you actually want?*
 - 05** *If your body could send you one message right now, what would it be?*
 - 06** *What's one thing you could put down this week, even temporarily?*
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What It's Like to Work With Shaping Destiny

Support that starts with where you actually struggle, not a generic plan.

Reaching out doesn't commit you to anything beyond a conversation. Most people start with a single consultation to talk through what's happening, before deciding what, if anything, comes next.

1 Initial Consultation

A confidential conversation to understand your current capacity, and what's been driving it.

2 Understanding the Pattern

Early sessions map how the burnout built, and what it's been protecting or avoiding.

3 A Personalised Plan

Practical tools drawn from CBT and ACT, paced to what's realistic given where you're starting from.

4 Ongoing Recovery

Regular sessions that adjust as your capacity actually changes, not on a fixed schedule.

Why People Choose Shaping Destiny

Burnout can affect your energy, confidence, relationships, decision-making and sense of purpose. Many people come to us after trying to push through on their own, only to discover that rest alone isn't enough.

At Shaping Destiny, you will be supported by a therapist who is:

- NHS (UK) trained in evidence-based psychological therapies
- BABCP-registered (British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapies)
- Experienced in helping professionals, leaders and individuals recover from burnout, chronic stress and emotional exhaustion
- Trained in CBT, ACT and trauma-informed approaches that address both the symptoms and underlying patterns contributing to burnout
- Focused on helping you restore energy, improve resilience and create sustainable habits for long-term wellbeing

Our work is guided by outcomes, not assumptions. Across our broader practice, many clients report meaningful improvements in confidence, emotional wellbeing and day-to-day functioning after structured therapy support.

A FEW QUESTIONS PEOPLE OFTEN ASK

Do I need to be signed off work to get help for burnout?

No. Many people we see are still working full-time; support is often most useful before things reach that point.

Will I just be told to rest more?

No. Recovery plans are practical and specific to your situation, not generic advice you've likely already tried.

How soon can we be seen?

Depending upon current availability, you may begin your recovery journey within 1-2 weeks.

READY WHEN YOU ARE

You Don't Have to Wait Until You Collapse

Most people reach out well before a crisis because they are tired of being tired, not because everything has fallen apart. If that's you, we are here.

Shaping Destiny's clinicians draw on CBT, ACT and integrative approaches to help you recover fully, and build the reserves to keep it from returning.

Book a private consultation — www.shaping-destiny.com

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This guide is provided for general educational and wellbeing purposes only and does not constitute medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The case study on page 7 is a composite illustration and does not describe a real individual. If you are in crisis or experiencing thoughts of self-harm, please contact a licensed mental health professional or your local emergency services immediately. © Shaping Destiny. All rights reserved.