

Compassion Fatigue and Self-Care for Healthcare Professionals

Compassion fatigue and burnout are increasingly common among healthcare professionals since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. One way to counter compassion fatigue is with self-care strategies.

The most insidious aspect of compassion fatigue is that it attacks **the very core** of what brings helpers into this work: their empathy and compassion for others. Compassion fatigue and burnout can result in the following for individuals:

- health-related problems
- emotional exhaustion
- lack of empathy
- desensitization
- cynicism
- hopelessness

With these potential consequences to organizations:

- loss of productivity
- decrease in job satisfaction
- staff turnover
- poor morale

Potentially in connection with burnout, studies show an increase in alcohol purchasing and consumption since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Isolation, burnout, state laws relaxing alcohol purchase, and inability to readily access support groups are all contributing factors.

Excessive drinking levels are defined as:

Women	
8 or more drinks a week 4 or more drinks within 2-3 hours	
Men	
15 or more drinks a week 5 or more drinks within 2-3 hours	
Under 21	Pregnant Women
Any alcohol use	Any alcohol use

Self-care is the antidote to burnout and is about coping with stress and taking proactive steps to enhance resilience and overall well-being.

Develop and implement a self-care plan that includes:

- Exercise
- Creative endeavors
- Nutrition
- Spiritual activities
- Sleep
- Social support

Self-care does not have to be complicated. Try one of these:

-  Watch a short video: try kittens, puppies, or a blooper reel from your favorite show
-  Sit in nature and watch the clouds
-  Take a short walk outside
-  Stretch
-  Put on some music and dance
-  Listen to a guided meditation: there are many free, short meditations online
-  Turn off electronics for a set amount of time
-  Do a small act of kindness
-  Rest your legs up a wall
-  Write in a journal: list daily accomplishments, how you are feeling, or what you are grateful for

References:

- American Journal of Orthopsychiatry: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2699394/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/alcohol-use.htm>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/directors-blog-alcohol-poses-different-challenges-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Tips-for-Healthcare-Professionals-Coping-with-Stress-and-Compassion-Fatigue/PEP20-01-01-016?referrer=from_search_result