

Compassion Fatigue

If you're supporting others through distress and have been for a prolonged period of time, it's likely that you might be experiencing burnout and stress related symptoms as a result. These burnout and stress related symptoms are a natural reaction called **compassion fatigue**, and these symptoms have 5 stages:



Idealist

Excited, thriving, volunteering for extra tasks; feeling satisfied at the difference you're making; maintaining self-care



Irritability

Energy and passion are decreasing; you're getting increasingly distracted; feeling some anger, cynicism, and sadness; self-care is slipping



Withdrawal

You're defeated, always tired; you're complaining about work and home; and you're having difficulty empathizing



Zombie

You're checked out; others seem incompetent; you have no time for anything but work; and there's a lot of self-importance about and anxious attention to work



Renewal vs. Chronic Burnout

Here you reach a fork in the road: sinking into compassion fatigue until it overtakes you or intervening and moving towards a sense of renewal

Try these 4 Strategies for Compassion Fatigue

1 Increasing Compassion Satisfaction

Or the sense of enjoyment and pleasure you get from supporting others. Increasing compassion satisfaction is *most impactful* early on to protect against compassion fatigue.

- Remember the value you bring—pin up thank you notes, save appreciative emails. Don't let the positive aspects go unnoticed—notice, appreciate, and prolong the positive.
- Focus on the importance of the work you do and review big successes (*for example: helping someone in distress*) or what can feel like smaller successes (*for example: prevention of future suffering*).

Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries with others and ourselves at work allows us to be appropriately compassionate.

- **Setting boundaries with others.**

Work Dilemma	Consider
Boundaries around optional tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this something that would bring me meaning or value at work? • Do I want to do it? • Does it make sense to do it? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the cost of saying yes? Will I have less energy for other things that I care about or that may be more important? • What is in my best interest in the long term?
Chronically overextending on non-optional tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your manager: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for clarity on job scope and priorities to ensure you're not overextending on low priority tasks or tasks outside of your role • Ask for resources that could make you more efficient or effective • Delegate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks that are out of scope to appropriate co-workers • Low priority tasks to someone with more time or to someone who might benefit from learning to do them (e.g., junior colleague)

- **Setting boundaries with yourself** between moments of supporting others and after work can help reduce the distress you carry with you.

Between interactions: try things that help release tension and/or help you reset (for example: tensing and releasing your muscles, moving your body, practice breathing slowly and deeply, even just changing where you are sitting in the room).

Boundaries at the end of the workday: try establishing a consistent habit at the end of the day that marks the transition from work life to home life (for example: make a to-do list for tomorrow, practice breathing slowly and deeply, use your commute to unwind and listen to a podcast, exercise).

Prioritizing Self-Care

Allows us to replenish ourselves so we can care for others. Self-care is not selfish, doesn't need to be expensive, and can be brief and still count.

- **Self-care is doing the basic and critical things to support your health:**

Nutrition	Exercise	Taking breaks	Sleeping	Social connection	Set boundaries
Eating well and enough	Moving your body	Aim for short breaks every 90 minutes	Aim for 7-8 hours	We have a fundamental need to connect with others	See above!

Getting started with self-care can be challenging—setting S M A R T goals can help.



Specific: it's clear what you're doing → *walking*

Measurable: it's clear how much of it you'll be doing → *5,000 steps every other day*

Achievable: not too hard for the level you're starting at → *yes, this seems achievable*

Relevant: for your overall goal and for you → *yes, relevant to exercise and for my love of being outside*

Time Bound: bound in a certain interval of time, so you know when you're done → *for two weeks*

Try these tips to get started and keep going:

- Pair up with someone who wants to make a change too—check in on each other or do the activity together.
- Pair the new activity with an old one, so you know when you'll be doing it (*for example: after dinner, I go for my walk*) and make it easy by giving yourself a cue (*for example: leave your walking shoes by the dinner table*).

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Overcoming Our Own Thinking

Our own thinking can be our greatest obstacle. When you are tempted to ignore the need for using these tips because you're having thoughts that it is selfish, check in with your thinking.

How is this thought serving you? Is it helping you or anyone else to ignore your needs? If it isn't serving you, try simply noticing it as an unhelpful thought rather than buying into it, so you can continue to move forward in prioritizing your needs and ensuring that you are curbing the risk of compassion fatigue.

Lyra is here to support you and your teammates when you need it.

Sign up at care.lyrahealth.com.