

The Burnout Barometer Worksheet

What we know about Burnout

Research shows that many professions, including medical ones, experience stress and burnout. For surgeons, there are many reasons for this, but some of the most common causes include:

- Increasing patient workload in both private and public practice
- Patient expectations that have increased due to social media and other public pressures
- Administration and bureaucracy that is increasing in most countries
- External pressure that can include regulators, public health bodies, and the media
- And surgical complexity that requires ongoing training to stay abreast of new techniques

Yet despite these pressures, surgeons must continue to deliver excellent patient care and reliable patient outcomes, all the while successfully leading their teams and their practices. As the profession continues to evolve, the potential for greater stress and burnout is being magnified.

Research from Healthcare

ISAPS professionals have contributed to the research on this topic, showing that stress and burnout are significant risk factors for surgeons, and plastic surgeons in particular. Dr. Gregory Evans, ISAPS Member, Professor of Surgery and Biomedical Engineering, and Director for the American Board of Plastic Surgery, has published papers in the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* suggesting that over 40% of US surgeons experience burnout (*Burnout in the Plastic Surgeon: Implications and Interventions*, G. Evans et al. 27 Sept 2016).

In this research, symptoms of burnout are defined as the presence of three conditions:

- Emotional Exhaustion (from excessive emotional demands)
- Depersonalization (cynical, negative, or detached responses to patient care)
- Reduced Personal Accomplishment (belief that one can no longer work effectively)

Clearly, these symptoms can deeply affect surgeon effectiveness and personal wellness.

Research from Business

There are also many consultants and professional coaches who routinely advise professionals on the topic of burnout. One such firm, *Tonic 365* of the UK, lists some of the most common causes of stress and burnout among working adults, including:

- Work Pressure
- Lack of Time
- Excessive Travel

- Lack of Facilities
- Lack of Motivation
- Boredom (with routines or small tasks)
- Inconsistency (mismatched expectations compared with actual work outputs)
- Family Commitments (including both children and elderly parents)

Jeff Archer, MD at *Tonic 365*, also challenges his clients to interrogate their level of “agency” around these issues. In other words, is the list above a series of real barriers to wellness, or are some items self-imposed, or even invented as excuses to avoid tackling difficulty? Either way, these challenges feel real to busy professionals and can be significant sources of stress and burnout. So the question is, what can we do about them?

The Burnout Barometer

Dr. Christina Maslach is a teacher, writer and global authority on psychology at work, including issues of control, stress and burnout. Her *Burnout Inventory* is distilled from years of research and identifies five criteria for measuring our levels of control in life and at work:

- Professional Efficacy
- Personal Accomplishment
- Emotional Exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Cynicism

From this research, Maslach also developed the *2 Minute Burnout Checkup* below (Maslach, C. HBR 2023):

The Two-Minute Burnout Checkup

Rate your level of stress from 0 to 10 on all six factors of burnout, with 0 equaling negligible stress and 10 equaling extreme stress. Add the numbers to get your general burnout score out of 60, and pay attention to specific burnout factors that score particularly high.

Burnout factors	LEVEL OF STRESS (0-10)
Workload: Sustainability of the amount of work on your plate	<input type="text"/>
Values: Whether you connect with your work on a deeper level	<input type="text"/>
Reward: Both financial rewards (salary, bonuses, stock options, etc.) and social rewards (whether you're recognized for your contributions)	<input type="text"/>
Control: The autonomy you have over when, where, and how you do your work	<input type="text"/>
Fairness: The feeling that you're treated equitably at work relative to your colleagues	<input type="text"/>
Community: Professional relationships that boost engagement	<input type="text"/>
Total:	<input type="text"/>
	/60

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Self Assessment

To measure your potential burnout, score yourself on the six burnout factors 0-10 for a total out of 60:

- This shows how you are doing right now
- Points are important but so is range meaning we are often healthy in some areas but not others
- The key is to identify strengths and weaknesses so you can make a plan to change

With this new data and awareness you can now create a targeted plan, which should fulfill three criteria:

- Emotional criteria (WHY you want to change your routines or surroundings)
- Behavioral criteria (WHAT routines will you change to make a difference)
- Actionable criteria (HOW you will implement these changes over time)

What to do Next

Negative Scores (e.g. your Workload score is 9, and therefore a significant source of burnout for you)

1. Make a list of all activities in your job
2. Pick three that support your most important goals – this is the “core work” you must protect
3. Look at all other activities and for these find a way to simplify, eliminate or delegate
4. Be ruthless in implementation, and be sure to measure impact as you make changes over time

Positive Scores (e.g. your Community score is 2, and therefore a great source of energy for you)

1. List all of your community activities
2. Find those that most contribute to your satisfaction – these are your core energizers to focus on
3. Look at the less satisfying activities (even in this positive area) and simplify, eliminate or delegate
4. Be ruthless in implementation, and be sure to measure impact as you make changes over time

Key Takeaways

- Research shows that controlling stress factors is possible despite work seemingly controlling us
- Neuroplasticity shows that we can actively change habits – and that no change is too small
- Scoring highly on Barometer factors is not a sign of weakness or incompetence
- The key is to logically analyze the emotions we feel in different parts of our work
- Only then, by actively changing routines, behaviors or surroundings can you address burnout

Questions for Reflection

- What is your current level of stress or burnout personally, in your team, or in your practice?
- What are the key sources of this burnout? Can they be controlled, changed or eliminated?
- What could a few small changes do to reduce stress and burnout for you, your team, or practice?
- What are your positive sources of energy (low Barometer scores) and how can you boost these?
- What is the cost of inaction? What will happen over time if you do nothing?