



# Are You Running on Smoke & Fumes?

## Here's How to Bounce Back from Burnout

By Felicia Brown, LMBT

TIME TO READ: 6 MIN

**THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND IT:** Life and work have changed tremendously since the beginning of 2020. We've all got our stories and stresses. Some are more universal in nature while others are individually ours to bear.

As we've worked to understand and adjust to the COVID-19 reality, massage therapists have had to adapt to a whole

new world in and out of our treatment rooms and personal lives. A recent poll of massage therapists by this magazine shows that the past year-plus's stressors include providing massage while trying to make sure clients and one's practice are virus-free; possible infection of oneself, family or friends; ever-changing rules about businesses being open, shut, or allowed

indoors or only outdoors; and recovering financially from shutdown regulations.

No matter how the last 15 months have affected you, it's been a trying situation. Whether through overwork, lack of work, personal challenges or the scramble among them all, many in our profession have gone from being fired up to running on smoke and fumes.

# The first step to preventing or solving a problem is becoming aware of it.

In short, we may be burned out or on our way there. If you aren't one of us, fantastic. However, given all that's happened since the COVID-19 train took off, I think it's a safe assumption most people are (or will be) experiencing some level of burnout.

## Are You Burned Out?

The first step to preventing or solving a problem is becoming aware of it. In the article, "The Tell Tale Signs of Burnout ... Do You Have Them?" (psychologytoday.com), Sherrie Bourg Carter, PsyD, writes, "You don't wake up one morning and all of the sudden 'have burnout.' Its nature is much more insidious, creeping up on us over time like a slow leak, which makes it much harder to recognize."

To catch that slow leak and consider whether you are approaching or experiencing burnout, start by assessing how you feel. (Note: I am not a counselor nor a physician, nor do I suggest self-diagnosing. However, I encourage you to read on, look inward and see if anything rings true. Seek additional medical guidance or support as needed.)

Are you burned out? Consider this list of potential symptoms, according to multiple medical sources:

- Loss of appetite
- Pessimism
- Loss of enjoyment
- Isolation
- Detachment
- Increased irritability
- Feelings of apathy and hopelessness
- Lack of productivity and performance

Further, physical symptoms of burnout can include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal pain,

dizziness, fainting or headaches—all of which should be medically assessed. As the body's resources are depleted, the immune system can weaken, making it more vulnerable to infections, colds, flu and other immune-related medical problems. Some may also notice negative emotions like depression, anger and anxiety.

Can you see yourself in any of these descriptions? If you can, don't worry—you aren't alone. In addition to the massage-profession-specific stressors mentioned at the top of this article, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Household Pulse Survey ([cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm](https://cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm)) indicates that Americans of all ages are experiencing heightened symptoms of anxiety and depression. Read on for strategies to regain your spark.

## Know Your Why & Find Your Joy

During one of my own burnout experiences, I ran across a quote by motivational speaker Alexander den Heijer that really hit home: "You often feel tired, not because you've done too much, but because you've done too little of what sparks a light in you."

As soon as I read it, I pulled out a notebook and made a list of things I love doing. Some might say this is discovering your why. What I noticed was my daily activities did not line up with what was on my list. I'd allowed my life to fill up with the should-dos and left out the truly important stuff. In short, I was missing out on joy.

What about you? Take a moment to gain clarity on your why or joy, listing as many answers as possible:

- What activities excite, energize or engage me?
- If money was no object, how would I spend my time?
- What do I most enjoy doing in my free time?
- What brings me joy?

Whatever your list, aim to add more fun stuff to each day.

## Identify the Drainers

As important as it is to know what gives us energy, it's crucial to know what dims our spark. Personally, I've often found it difficult to let go of tasks I didn't like because it was hard to ask for or receive help.

Accordingly, I've held on to things that sucked the life out of me for far too long. If this is true for you, take another moment to gain clarity on your why-nots and joy-stealers by asking yourself these questions:

- What activities no longer excite, energize or engage me?
- If money was no object, how would I stop spending my time?
- What do I least enjoy doing in my free time?
- What brings me *no* joy?

Are any of these activities part of your day-to-day life? If so, the next section will help.

## Ditch the Downers

As you notice changes to be made, it may initially feel too difficult to make adjustments. However, even tiny modifications can bring big shifts of energy, improving your ability to conquer bigger challenges.

A simple way to do this is to notice,

pause, pass on or purge, and re-energize. For example:

**Notice:** You notice that you post daily on Facebook for marketing, but it's tiring and possibly ineffective.

**Pause:** Take a week off from Facebook and send "I miss you" cards to old clients instead.

**Pass on:** Hire or trade out with someone to do your social media posting.

**Purge:** Determine if social media is not worth the hassle, and use the time to join a networking group.

What tasks can you pause, pass on or purge? The tasks that drain you are often a boost for someone else. Make two people happy by letting them go.

## Do One Thing

South African human rights activist Desmond Tutu said, "There is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time." Although it may feel overwhelming, moving past burnout also happens in

small nibbles.


When you feel tired, overwhelmed or stressed, pause and ask, "What is one thing I can do to feel better, heal myself or get energy right now?" Some ideas...

- Drink water
- Breathe deeply
- Feel gratitude
- Pray
- Meditate
- Take a walk
- Stand in the sun
- Close your eyes
- Take a shower
- Have a snack
- Call a friend
- Stretch
- Listen to a special song
- Smile
- Snuggle your pet
- Share a hug
- Plant a flower
- Sing
- Dance
- Be in nature
- Get massage
- Add to this list with your own energy boosters.


It is often through our brokenness that we find the way back to our spark and ourselves. By identifying the things that boost or drain our energy, and adding in more *whys* than *why-nots*, you can go from the smoke and fumes of burnout to a purpose- and joy-filled life. **M**

Felicia Brown, LMBT, is a business, marketing and life coach—as well as a recovering workaholic and a survivor of multiple burnouts. She is a regular contributor to *MASSAGE Magazine*; read the article, "This is What the Highest-Earning Massage Therapists Have in Common," featuring Brown, on [massagemag.com](http://massagemag.com). Download Brown's free e-book, "Do ONE Thing," at [spalutions.com/doonething](http://spalutions.com/doonething).

Read "Massage Therapist, Heal Thyself. Practicing During the Pandemic, this MT Found the Strength Needed to Self-Connect and Carry On," by Robin C. Duffy, at [massagemag.com](http://massagemag.com).



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