

From
**EXHAUSTED
FOUNDER**
to **SUCCESSFUL
ENTREPRENEUR**



**The handbook for busy founders
on how to escape burnout**

Welcome!

This eBook was created by the [Chanty](#) team for anyone who wants to learn the symptoms of burnout and how to avoid it in their lives.

To make this book come to life, we ran a survey with successful CEOs, founders and entrepreneurs, to find out how they battle burnout in their professional and personal lives.

We would like to thank all of our survey participants for making this eBook possible, as well as Stefan Debois from [Survey Anyplace](#) for providing us with a great tool to run our survey.

Enjoy your read!



What is burnout?	03
Is burnout a medical condition?	04
What are the symptoms of burnout?.....	05
How to deal with burnout?	
Set realistic expectations	06
Change your routine	08
Prioritize your work	11
Take breaks in all shapes and forms	15
Vacations = more work done?.....	15
Daily breaks	17
Getting enough sleep.....	18
Take care of yourself.....	20
Watch what you eat	20
Work out every now and then.....	22
Set some boundaries.....	23
Conclusions	25
Get your special bonus to preventing burnout	26

There is no progress without struggle. And who's more competent to talk about struggle than entrepreneurs? While working for a salary is the safe bet, entrepreneurs sometimes put their entire life savings on the line and risk everything they own for the success of their businesses.

Admirable as it is, entrepreneurship can take a massive toll on your mental and physical health. Even though we've grown accustomed to stories of CEOs working 100-hour weeks, we rarely hear of the consequences of such a life, the major one being **burnout**.

In this eBook, we talk about what burnout is, what its symptoms are and we introduce some of the ways you can stop it in its tracks. This eBook was largely inspired by a survey we ran, which was completed by over 100 founders, CEOs and managers.

What is burnout?

You've probably heard the term a few times as many people claim to suffer from burnout. The term was first coined in 1974, by Herbert Freudenberger, an American psychologist. He described it as a consequence of severe stress in specific professions, which he called "helping". These were occupations such as a doctor or a nurse, where the person doing the job had to sacrifice themselves for others. Over time, the term started being used more widely and applied in different professions.

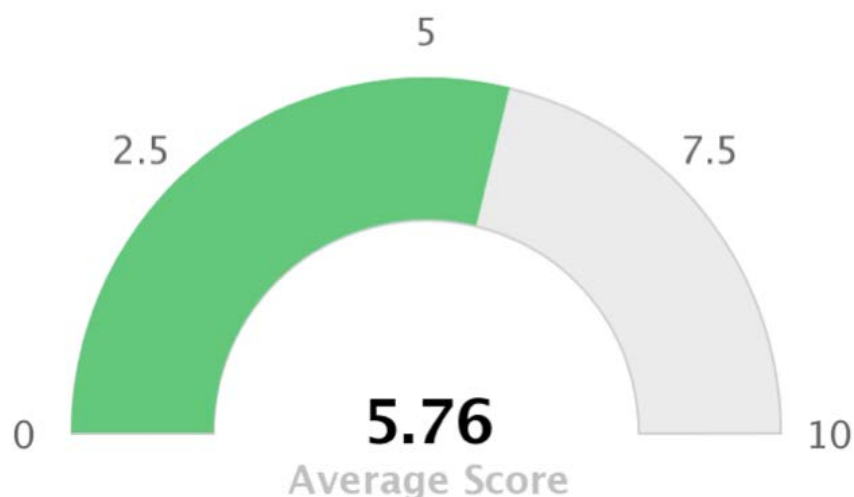
Those suffering from burnout are in a state of chronic stress, they are exhausted physically and emotionally, detached from reality, feeling ineffective and unaccomplished. Burnout doesn't happen at once – it gradually progresses to a state where you can no longer function properly, personally or professionally.

Is burnout a medical condition?

There is no official data describing burnout as a condition, as it's still a relatively new phenomenon. For example, depression is widely studied and treated, with well-documented symptoms and ways to help the patient suffering from it.

Since there are few official mentions of burnout as a medical condition, some experts agree that it's merely a consequence of something bigger, such as anxiety or depression. However, burnout is mostly related to professional work, while depression has deeper roots in our everyday lives.

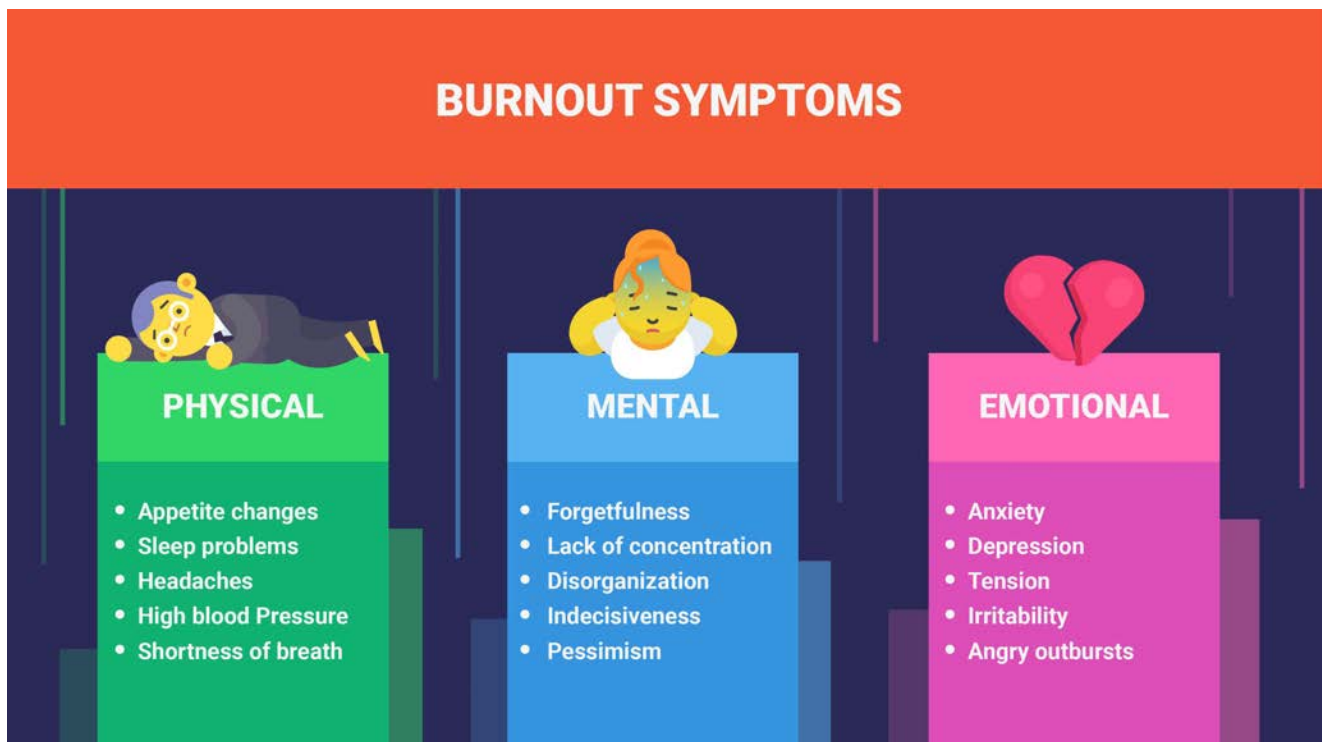
✂ How would you rate the impact of burnout on your productivity today? 0 – I don't feel burnout 10 – It absolutely kills my productivity



What are the symptoms of burnout?

If you're wondering whether you're suffering from burnout yourself, there are a few tell-tell symptoms to watch out for:

- You are constantly tired and you feel drained every day, without energy to move yourself
- You have insomnia or severe sleeping problems
- You have frequent physical pains (such as chest pain) and you get ill frequently
- You have a loss of appetite
- You regularly have increased feelings of anxiety and anger
- You have trouble focusing and you feel detached and isolated from your environment
- You don't enjoy the activities you used to enjoy before
- You feel hopeless
- You get irritated easily
- You underperform at work



If that doesn't sound all that bad, suffering from burnout can have [some quite devastating consequences](#). These include diabetes, coronary heart disease, cardiovascular issues, prolonged fatigue, respiratory issues and finally, mortality under the age of 45.

Clearly, burnout needs to be recognized as a proper threat to physical and mental health. As a busy entrepreneur and founder, you need to be aware of these risks and symptoms and stop them early on in their tracks.

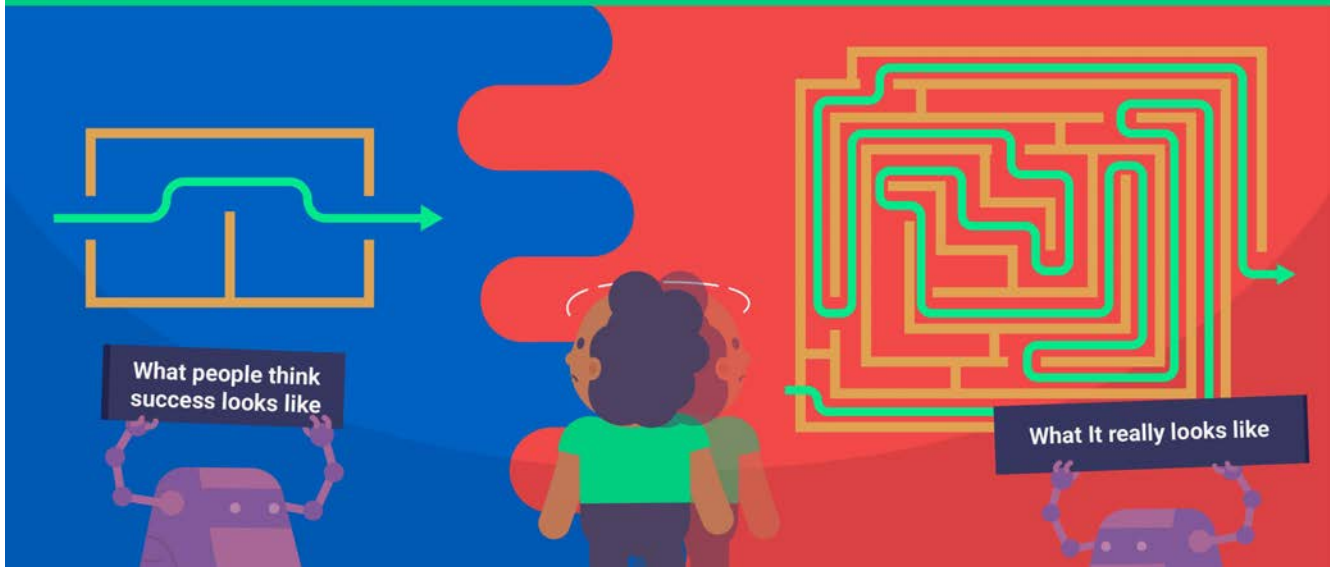
Here are some of the ways you can prevent burnout and lead a happier, more productive life.

Set realistic expectations

One of the main reasons burnout happens is because we have unrealistic expectations of what we need to fulfill. Trouble is, any regular employee has only the expectations of their CEO/manager to live up to. As a startup founder, you have your own expectations, plus the perceived ones from your employees, family, peers and more.

You're well aware when a boss sets unrealistic expectations that you cannot fulfill. Unfortunately, when we work for ourselves, we are often not aware that what we yearn for is not only difficult to achieve but sometimes even impossible. We look up to the successful lives of others, which we see on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and other places.

EXPECTATIONS



Solopreneurs who wake up at 4 AM to run their own company, manage a healthy social life, get to the gym three times per week, get enough sleep and spend time with their families. As you see these role models, you perceive these achievements as success and base your own expectations on them. However, no two entrepreneurs are the same, and their expectations shouldn't be either.

Instead of focusing on someone else's vision of success, try to envision the **most realistic scenario**. *What does success mean to you, and how realistic is it for you to achieve it within a given time frame?*

According to Adam Hempenstall, the CEO of Better Proposals, one of the ways he battles burnout is by keeping deadlines normal and preventing projects overlapping with each other.

"Don't do stressful stuff. Take pains to prevent having crazy deadlines. Don't overlap projects. Have time where you're "off work" by playing sport. Have other hobbies."

- Adam Hempenstall, CEO of Better Proposals

Change your routine

As a founder, you're probably overwhelmed by all the tasks you need to handle. Especially if you're in an early-stage startup, you could be in charge of development, sales, marketing, hiring, all the way to maintaining the company's Instagram account. To make all of this workload easier, you probably have a certain routine – what tasks you do and when you do them. **Routines are great because after repeating things for a while, it becomes second nature and you get more efficient at your job(s).**

The problem is, **facing the same kind of work**, issues or people every day can have negative effects and cause burnout. Luckily, changing up your routine is one of the easiest things to do.

"My top 3 methods: - to change responsibilities for some time: do research instead of writing, for example, or do content editing instead of research. - to visit a few niche conferences where I'll meet new people, experts in their field, for inspiration and new business ideas. - to do some mini-retreats: travel to a neighboring city, take a relaxing bath with a glass of wine, visit a yoga class, etc."

- Lesley J. Vos, content strategist at Bid4Papers

The first thing you can do is to change your work setting. If you don't have to work from the office, try doing some part of your work from a co-working space, from home, in a public library or somewhere outside. A new location could give you some much-needed inspiration.

If you're stuck doing the work you hate, perhaps it's time to change your work completely. That's what Wojciech Jasnos, the CEO and founder of [RocketLink](#) did. He was a surgeon, working his fingers to the bone and realizing it's not the kind of life he wanted to have. He turned around and founded a SaaS company to get back in control of his life and become happier.

Another great thing you can do is try to **vary the work** a little bit. Switch the tasks around, do them at a different part of the day or the week or ask a partner or co-worker to help out.

The third thing to do is to **delegate some of the tasks** and take them off your plate. There are multiple reasons for letting someone else take care of your work:

- You hate it
- You're not good at it
- It's repetitive and boring
- It can be automated
- It's not relevant to your long-term goals

DELEGATING THE TASKS



If a task on your list meets some of these criteria, it's time to find someone else to do it for you. Luckily, there is no shortage of good methods for delegation nowadays. If it's something as simple as getting data from emails, you can create a Zapier workflow and save hours of time. If it's something more complex that needs full-time attention, you can hire someone else to take care of the work in-house, as long as it's in line with your financial plans.

Moreover, you can **outsource the work** to a third party, such as a virtual assistant or some other type of freelancer. Platforms such as Upwork, [Jobrack](#) or [Freeeup](#) allow you to find a qualified workforce, no matter the type of task you need to be done.

Finally, one way to change up your routine is to re-motivate yourself and remember your passion, what got you started in the first place.

According to Lukas Schwekendiek, a self-employed life coach, this is one of the most effective ways for him to get back on track and prevent burnout.

All in all, by changing up the way you do things, you will probably find yourself having more energy and enthusiasm for your work. Whether it's a new place to work, changing the order or the way you tackle your tasks or outsourcing the task to a third party, it will make your life as a founder easier and less stressful, reducing chances of burnout.

Prioritize your work

As a busy founder, you probably catch yourself going in a million directions. Everything needs your attention, deadlines are not working in your favor, your employees need help and you simply feel like there are too many things going on at once. What's even worse, it all seems equally important.

In fact, some things could wait, while others demand your immediate attention. Some tasks require you to do them personally, others can be handled by someone from your team, or you can simply outsource them. The key to effectively managing your workload is prioritization, and here's how you can pull that off.

HOW TO PRIORITIZE TASKS



1. List all your tasks

Before making any decisions on priorities, make sure you list all the tasks that need your attention. You can go as granular as a single day or as broad as a month. Open up a text document in your preferred app and throw it all in one place. Don't pay too much attention to the order of the tasks, as we'll take care of that in the following steps. You can even try using a dedicated tool for prioritization, [such as Airfocus](#).

One of our survey participants, Omer Usanmaz (certified scrum master at Quoper), says that writing things down is his best method for preventing the feeling of burnout.

2. The key difference – important is not the same as urgent

A lot of us get this part wrong with any type of work we do. If something is urgent, it means that there's a deadline approaching and that it absolutely needs to be done by the deadline. If you blow through

the deadline, you'll miss a release date, someone else won't be able to finish their work, you'll lose a client or an important investment, etc. On the other hand, something could be important but not depend on being done immediately.

Bottom line is – **all urgent tasks are important. However, not all important tasks are urgent.** If a task is indeed urgent, it goes to the top of your to-do list.

3. Judge based on the value

Once you've put your most urgent tasks on the top of your to-do list, it's time to tackle the rest. You probably have a pile of tasks that all seem similar, and now it's time to sort them according to priority, or better yet, value.

By this I mean the value the finished task brings to your company. For instance, working on new features has far more priority than working on your database. Bringing a new client on board brings more value than working on your internal documentation. Whether value to you means more profit, better quality of service and product or a happier customer, your remaining tasks should be sorted according to this metric.

"I always prioritize and plan out my work. Not all tasks I have are equally important or urgent, so by tackling my most important and urgent tasks first, I save a lot of time, and feel less stressed."

- Nenad Milanovic, CEO of Clockify

Alternatively, think of value in terms of who's involved. The more people depend on a task being done, the higher it is in value.

4. Sort based on effort

Now that your most important tasks are put in the top of your to-do list, the less important ones can get your attention. If you have two or more tasks that are similar in importance, weigh them against each other in terms of effort. How difficult are they going to be to perform and how much time is it going to take?

Many experts suggest “eating the frog” and handling the most difficult, time-consuming tasks first, before moving on to the easier ones. You can choose whichever method you prefer, as both have their advantages. Doing the heavy lifting first will make the easier tasks seem even easier while handling the easy tasks first will make you feel good about crossing something off your list.

5. Know that some things are out of your hands

Some things you have to do will simply not go according to plan. Things will change and tasks can change priority, forcing you to rearrange your list. Before getting upset, understand that you need to be flexible and ready to change up your priority list.

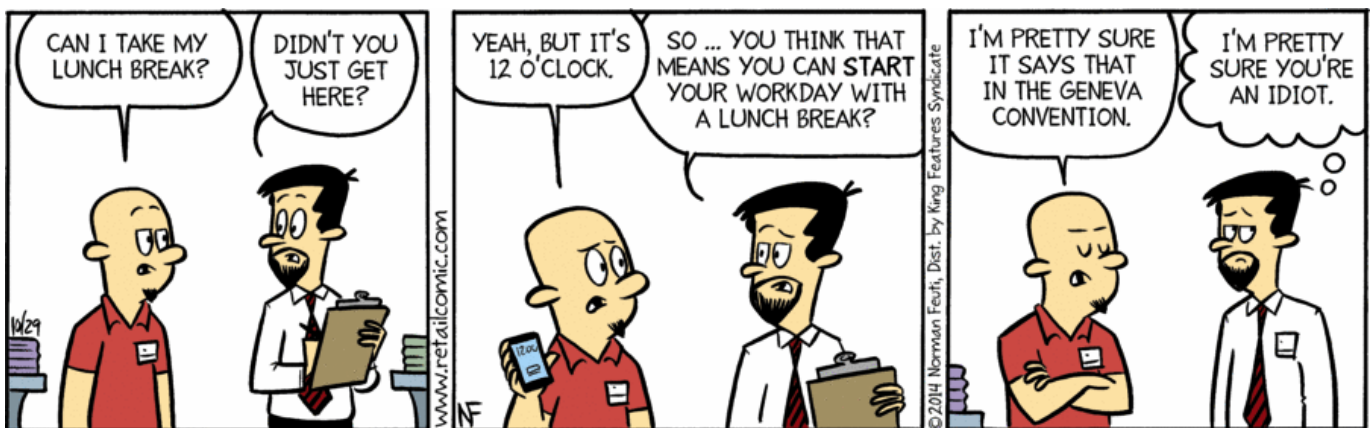
Also, it will probably happen that you just can't manage to do it all. Understand that in these situations, it's completely okay to drop something from your list and leave it for some other time.

Prioritizing does not come naturally for most entrepreneurs.

However, with a mountain of tasks waiting to get done and many other people depending on your time and availability, it's a necessary skill to develop if you want to take your business and yourself to the next level.

Take breaks in all shapes and forms

We're risking the title of Captain Obvious here, but one of the most effective ways of avoiding burnout is to get proper rest. Whether it's short breaks during the day, shutting down all electronics during the weekend or taking a really nice vacation, you need and deserve some time off. Even though you think the company will collapse without you, the truth is, the company needs you with a fresh mind and not one scattered all over the place.



Source

Vacations = more work done?

In one research by HBR, it was found that **countries with more vacation time actually had more productive workers.**

Counterintuitive, maybe, but the people behind the research actually have good logic behind it.

**IF YOU GET TIRED
LEARN TO REST,
NOT QUIT.**



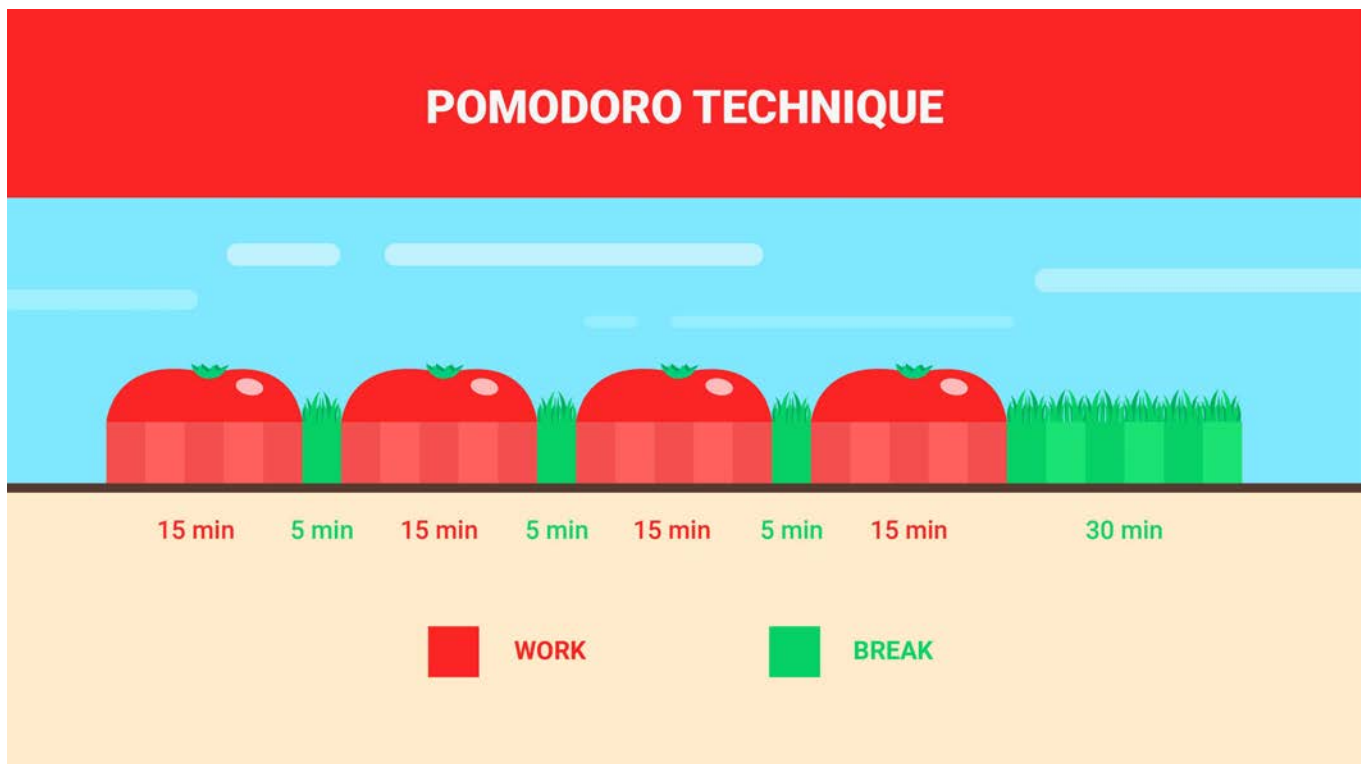
Employees that have more days off are more productive because they have to find a way to be efficient. They have (presumably) the same workload as someone with half of their vacation time, so they have to find a way to accomplish it all. So, the next time you take a vacation, don't think of it as time wasted, think of it as a time to recharge to get even more done once you get back, by working smarter – not harder.

"(I take) strategic vacations. I know I would reach a point of diminishing returns if I keep pushing in the red zone. A week away once or twice a year is a godsend."

- Dejan Gajšek, growth marketer

Daily breaks

Have you ever caught yourself being so busy that you barely find time for a meal or seeing your family? Taking regular breaks every day is imperative to your productivity and mental well-being, as just 10 minutes of rest can properly refresh your mind.



You can start by taking scheduled breaks every hour or so. Since it's too easy to get carried away, you can use some external help. Apps such as [Toggl](#) or [PomoDone](#) allow you to track your time so you can see what kind of activities take up most of your time and when you really need a break. In fact, PomoDone is based on the Pomodoro technique, where you go into 25-minute bursts of productivity, followed by a 5-minute break. That way, even if you can't force yourself to go on a break, the app will do it for you.

“Most of us can only do 4-5 hours of focused work (that is, concentrating on, preferably, one task without giving in to distractions). Working more hours will probably result in decreased productivity and creativity as well as mental fatigue. And, of course, minimize digital distractions such as app and email notifications.”

- **Mikita Cherkasau, co-founder at Your Extra Marketer**

Getting enough sleep

Many entrepreneurs read inspiring stories from stars such as Gary Vaynerchuk who wake up at the crack of dawn, some as early as 4 AM. Can you imagine how productive you could be in those wee hours, while everyone else is hugging their pillow or partner? Problem is, becoming a morning person doesn't happen overnight (pardon the pun), and waking up early requires going to bed early.

In the survey we ran, our participants ranked sleep very highly as well. Christina Willner, the CEO of [Amazing Marvin](#), says that she goes to bed around 9 PM to avoid burnout and hit maximum productivity. Danijel Milošević of Default Design says he prevents burnout by getting at least 8 hours of sleep every night.

Your sleep affects all areas of your life, and especially your ability to successfully run a business. Without quality sleep, you will not only suffer at work but also put your health in danger. [Some of the effects](#) of poor sleep include problems with thinking, concentration and memory, weaker immunity, high blood pressure, gaining extra weight, increased risk for diabetes, lower sex drive and much more.

So, how much sleep should you be getting? Ideally, anywhere from 7-9 hours for an adult is the best amount to be fully rested the next morning. However, life happens and it can simply be too difficult to get this amount of sleep every night. As Arnold Schwarzenegger said [in his motivational speech](#), sleep for six hours, and if you can't –sleep faster. In other words, six hours will be a good enough amount to keep you decently rested and healthy.

One easy way to get more shuteye is to remove all electronics away from yourself before hitting the bed. [As research has shown](#), more than 90% of people admit to using their phones or some other type of electronic device before going to bed.

While you may be worried about catching that client email, getting in touch with your overseas developers or checking up on things in your project management tool, this can all wait until the morning.

If you use electronics an hour before going to bed, this will delay your circadian rhythm and prevent the release of melatonin, a hormone that induces sleep. As a result, you will have a harder time falling asleep.

The work will be there as you wake up, so don't end your day staring at your screen. You won't be able to accomplish much and you will harm your sleep schedule and endanger your health. On the other side, when you wake up seems to matter as well.

While not all of us are early birds, it turns out we should at least strive to be. [Research has shown](#) that **those waking up early have higher chances of success in their career** than their peers who like to sleep in.

Take care of yourself

Your business may be your life at the moment, but you need to think of life **beyond work**. Once the workday is done (if it's ever done for you), there's family, social life, hobbies – things that really matter. While growing a company and saving up money is an admirable goal, there is more to life than being just an entrepreneur. By focusing on other important aspects in life and taking good care of yourself, you are on a good track to prevent burnout.

Watch what you eat

I won't give you the usual run-around on not eating junk food. As busy as you are, you're probably well informed that eating tuna and rice is far healthier than making pizza your staple food. Entrepreneurs that work a lot don't have the luxury or the time to eat and prepare healthy meals for themselves.

However, the consequences of junk food diet can be devastating. Not only will you gain excessive weight easily, but you will also endanger your health by raising your blood sugar and cholesterol

levels. Couple this with little to no physical activity, and it's a recipe for disaster.

Besides having an effect on your overall condition and health, food also [has a major effect on our mood](#). From not eating enough, skipping meals, all the way to eating too little or too much of certain foods, we can greatly influence how we feel simply by thinking more about what we eat.

Nutrient	Impact on Mood	Food Source
Carbohydrate ¹	Produces a sense of calm	100% whole grain bread and cereal, potatoes, beans, peas, and corn
Protein ¹	Enhances alertness and boosts motivation	Lean meat, fish, poultry, low-fat or fat-free dairy, eggs, beans, and nuts
Omega-3 Fatty Acid ¹	Quiets cravings and induces calm	Salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring, flax seeds, and walnuts
B Complex (Including: Vitamin B6 ⁵ , Vitamin B12 ⁶ , and Folate ⁷)	Improves memory and concentration, regulates mood, controls emotions, and improves sleep	Fortified cereal and soy products, potatoes, chickpeas, clams, oysters, fish, lean meat, low-fat or fat-free dairy, broccoli, spinach, collards, and 100% whole grains

Even though an occasional night of burgers and pizza is a great treat, try not to make it too much of a habit, because it will affect you, your health and your business. You can give meal prepping a try and prepare a week of healthy meals in advance. Alternatively, there is now a wide range of restaurants offering healthy food delivery. If you work from home, as many entrepreneurs nowadays do, you can try cooking for yourself instead of ordering. Not only will you eat cleaner, but you will also get away from the laptop and phone for a bit.

Work out every now and then

If you're still with me by now, you're probably thinking that it sounds more like something from a life coach, rather than someone giving advice to busy entrepreneurs. Much like eating right, **getting exercise will benefit you in multiple ways and help with preventing burnout**. Working out can make you feel happier, live longer, feel more energized, lose weight, reduce the risk of disease and the [list goes on](#).

You're now probably piling up a list of excuses on why you can't find the time to exercise and how you really cannot fit it into your busy schedule. However, there are [plenty of ways](#) to get some type of workout, without spending hours at the gym.

Start by walking more (or biking) instead of driving to the office. Don't use the elevator – go for the stairs instead. If you use public transportation, get off the bus one station earlier. Use your lunch breaks to break a light sweat with some body-weight exercises. Especially if you work from home, there is immense room to insert a workout break somewhere in your daily routine.

For example, at the Chanty office, we do daily exercises as part of our work day. It's a great way to break away from the routine and get some sweat going even without visiting the gym.



Besides being inherently good for your health, working out benefits your work as well. You will feel more rested and relaxed and have a clearer focus. In fact, working out is one of the main strategies for burnout used by the CEO of [Cloudlead](#), Noman Siddiq.

"Regular Exercise, Hydration, 8 hours of Sleep, work life balance and 35 hours of work each week."

- Noman Siddiq, CEO of Cloudlead

Set some boundaries

You're probably well aware that you shouldn't mix your professional and personal life. Easy to say – many entrepreneurs think that their work IS their life. Those working for a salary can tune out after 5 PM and enjoy the rest of the day restlessly. Doing the same with the future of the company on your back – not such an easy feat

"I have two young girls (3 and 5) and they are the best burnout preventer/reducer by helping keep priorities straight (family first), preventing you from bringing those stressors into your family (they honestly don't care/know/understand), and help you put your work down for a few hours between when the normal workday is done and when they go to sleep (when you pick work back up). I have often found that that intrinsic requirement to step away provides far more clarity than actually focusing on the problem can ever bring."

- Scott A. Rogerson, CEO at UpContent

However, **setting some boundaries between your private life and work will benefit both realms.** There are many ways to do this, but the simplest one is to simply turn off work after you clock out. No laptop, no phone, no emails – just your own time. You can completely stay away from any kind of work on weekends, for example. As Dino Kukić, the SEO manager from [Hundred5](#) says, this is his golden rule – he completely turns off his computer on weekends.

"Trying to completely cut away my access to computer during the weekends, training 3 times a week to distract my mind from work."

- Dino Kukić, SEO Manager at Hundred5

If you have a side project, then setting boundaries is significantly easier. You may feel compelled to reply to messages late at night on a Saturday, but if you inform your clients that weekends are strictly non-working, you'll have an easier time shutting off.

Conclusions

One of the biggest problems with burnout is that many entrepreneurs (and people in general) don't tend to take it seriously. Often seen as just being tired, burnout is a legitimate issue that can cause serious problems with your health, affecting your personal life and your work.

In a time when working hard and struggling is seen as a badge of honor, more and more entrepreneurs see this as the only possible way to move forward. Instead of finding ways to work smarter and have less on our plates, we are told that struggling and burning yourself out is the only way to move forward.

Don't fall into the trap of modern-day entrepreneurship. Burnout is not a natural state and no matter what kind of success you achieve, it's simply not worth paying the price of your health and losing time with people close to you.

Would you like a free bonus?

If you go to our ProductHunt page and leave feedback and share your thoughts about this eBook, we'll send you a link to **our free playlist for preventing burnout**. We've carefully curated a list of songs to help you relax and unwind and you can grab it completely free.

This is just one of the eBooks we published at Chanty, and if you want to read the rest of them, [click on this link](#).

If you would like to read more on productivity, work-life balance, teamwork and team communication, you will definitely find something useful for you [on the Chanty blog](#).

If you want to stay up to date with Chanty on social media, you can follow us on these channels:



Thanks until the next time!

