

# BURN OUT

HOW TO SURVIVE STRESS AND BURN OUT by Dr Bruce Woolard (Sociologist)

Not a single person can truly say that he is free of stress and depression. This devastating emotional and mental malady plays havoc with thousands of people. The stigma attached to depression results in many sufferers remaining silent and consequently they do not seek help or advice.

The human mind is a strange and marvellous creation of God. It has fantastic potential. It can handle reason and logic, it can make judgements in accord with its own sense of values, it can store innumerable facts and experiences out of the past, and can recall them to act on the present, it can dream and aspire to the highest acts of benevolence toward others and it can, with cold calculation, devise the most diabolical acts of destruction imaginable. At the same time the mind of man can trigger the emotions of the heart and when linked with heaven it can conceive the glory and reality of God to surrender to Him. Not only as Creator, but also as Saviour and Lord. Thus it is the mind of man that sets him apart from all species on the planet. This is why in God's first efforts to call an individual to Himself, He works through the mind. The Scriptures in *Romans 10:17* states: "*Faith comes by hearing.*" In *Isaiah 1:8* God says "*Come now and let us reason together.*" The mind is the faculty by which we reason and retain information. If our minds are not renewed then they will deteriorate into the abyss of spiritual darkness. The atrocities and tragedies of life indicate that many more people are caught in the trap of evil not because they intend to commit these diabolical acts but rather because a moral fibre, a value system that makes them separate from the rest of creation is broken, splintered or burnt out. Burn out is a syndrome relating to one's emotional state of mind that may be fatal. Stress that is not managed becomes distress that erodes your self-confidence, identity, and moral values.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is an emotional state of mind that has been brought about by protracted stress and pressure. Mood swings can range from exhilarating moments of joy to prolonged periods of extreme despondency. Anxiety disorders are the most common emotional emesis in society and many people suffer in silence and secrecy, either ashamed or unaware of the availability of excellent treatments. One in ten people suffer from a phobia at some point in their lives. Millions of people suffer from panic disorders. People are desperately longing for some information that may help them to cope with these pressures. Not all depression (low-mood) is chronic but ongoing "downs" or "the blues" may lead to what is called Clinical Depression. In most cases this illness goes unrecognised and this is accompanied with unnecessary suffering and pain.

*What are the symptoms of depression?*

- A decrease in energy levels.
- A feeling of hopelessness,
- Lack of motivation.
- A change in sleeping patterns.
- A loss or increase in appetite.
- Irritability.
- Sweaty hands.
- A tight feeling around the throat.
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations.
- Stomach pains.
- Hyperventilation
- Thought blockages.
- Disinterest in life.
- Neglect of basic personal hygiene.
- Anxiety attacks at night.
- Introspection.
- Guilt and worry about the past.
- A fear that people will notice that you are not functioning properly.
- A fear that you are losing your mind
- A decline in your level of interest in relationships.
- Anti-social.

●Emotional outbursts. ●Tearfulness. ●A sense of time being affected. ●Hesitant. ●Your value of judgment becomes amiss.●You place minor issues out of context. ●You think and dwell on unimportant matters. ●You fail to appreciate the beauty of nature. ●You feel rejected, alone, and inadequate. ●Your thoughts about God and religion become distorted. ●Negative thoughts. ●Suicidal thoughts. These are some of the symptoms that may indicate that you are suffering from a form of depression.

### *THE SPIRITUAL CAUSE OF DEPRESSION*

Anxiety disorders often reveal a disconnection with God and the lack of community involvement and a weakness in the support structures from those around you who make up your family and friends. Sometimes Burn Out syndrome can lead one to a deeper appreciation of God and restore one's confidence and faith in the Divine Creator. The main cause for human weaknesses relate to the fact that humanity is in rebellion against God. By nature we are sinners and sin, which is disobedience against God, leaves us detached from the Lord's eternal purpose and plan for our lives. This may be the spiritual cause of feeling that you have an identity crisis. However there are many other causes that compound the problem of burn out.

### *PHYSICAL CAUSES OF DEPRESSION*

Every seven years an individual goes through a replenishing of physical cells in the body. The chemical changes, which occur in puberty, include hormonal changes. These changes do not only manifest themselves physically when one enters adolescence but one's sense of self worth and identity is in crisis. Very few people including the so-called experts fully understand the connection between bi-chemical changes in your body and human behaviour. More and more people who I counsel fall into the danger phase of maturity (35-50). Many folk don't realise that the same chemical changes that took place during the adolescence phase of life re-occurs during this middle age phase. Hormonal changes leaves the sufferer feeling unwanted, inadequate. These strange emotions may lead to a desire to feel wanted, and accepted. This may result in sexual promiscuity or some other form of escapism. Some folk begin to abuse alcohol, others turn to gambling, others search for meaning in alternative religions, others quit on their partners or begin to lie and cheat. This phase of deception is reminiscent of teenage rebellion. The only difference is that as matured adults we begin to live and act uncharacteristically. We have a "don't care" attitude. A diminished sense of responsibility. These personality changes are similar to schizophrenia. The doctor Jeckel and Mr Hide becomes evident as we struggle to come to terms with the "real" self.

### *HOW THE BRAIN FUNCTIONS*

This section of information is rather technical and if you have difficulty in understanding the flow of information do not despair. An attached diagram will help you to understand this area and as you study the diagram it will make a lot more sense to you.

Emotions are regulated in that part of the brain called the "Limbic" system. Other functions such as body temperature, hormone levels, blood pressure, sleep, appetite, and behaviour are controlled by the Limbic system of the brain. Information is transferred from one part of the brain to another with the help of chemicals called "neuro transmitters" (these transmitters are best illustrated in terms of the function of a cell phone. Sometimes the caller runs out of airtime or the batteries are flat or they are out of range and the information becomes scrambled. This is precisely what happens in the brain when neuro transmitters malfunction. There are two mechanisms within the nervous system, which allow signals to pass from one cell to another. There is a gap between various nerve cells or neurons called a synaps. Information in the brain is transmitted through the electrical impulse from cell A to cell B through the synaps. A second mechanism, which is of a chemical nature, is needed to transfer the nerve impulse from cell A to cell B. As the electrical impulse reaches cell A a chemical reaction is initiated. Small sac-like structures contain neuro transmitters that fuse with the cell wall. These sacs then open and empty their contents into the synaps. These

chemicals virtually float over to cell B attaching to its cell wall at specific places called receptorsites. Mood swings occur when these neuro transmitters malfunction. These transmitters that are linked to the mood of the individual are known as serotonin and norepinephrine. Research indicates that increased levels of serotonin causes high mood or elation while a depletion of serotonin will cause low levels that will make the individual depressed. The lack of sleep means that the brain will not manufacture and produce serotonin. This serotonin depletion will affect the mood of the individual. It is the same as trying to run a motorcar on an empty tank. Sleep is nature's way of replenishing the stocks and restoring the serotonin levels. Interrupted sleep and a lifestyle that deprives an individual of sleep will result in a low level of serotonin that will create depression and low mood. Most people do not associate change in behaviour and their negative feelings with that of sleep and eating habits. Certain foods can cause allergies. When the allergy is external it is more noticeable and can be treated but when it is internal, it manifests itself in human behaviour. In the words of Hypocrites: "Let your food be your medicine and your medicine your food." We are what we eat. Certain foods can influence high moods or low moods. Alcohol is a depressant. Coffee has a high level of caffeine, which attacks the nervous system. Foods mass-produced, which have been affected by pesticides and insecticides, will attack the nervous system and cause the Limbic system in the brain to malfunction. Organic foods and foods that are not processed will bring about a healthier state of mind and body. Western eating habits have impacted on the health of the population. Habits have been established and poor disciplines in terms of diet have caused this disease to flourish. Regrettably most people do not take special care in what they eat or what they drink. Our bodies are filled with toxic chemicals that cause strange illnesses and attack the nervous cells of our body. Our emotions and thought patterns are influenced by these chemicals and our personality changes. We begin to live a lie, we continue to pretend, we hide our stress, until the wheels come off or the vehicle refuses to go any further because there is no petrol in the tank. When this happens we isolate ourselves from others, and we try to hide ourselves from reality and the Creator.

## **HOW TO FIND HELP**

Most people are afraid of visiting a psychiatrist or psychologist. One understands how real these fears are and therefore it is important that a more holistic approach to this problem is necessary. Make an appointment with your medical doctor and inquire if he understands serotonin depletion because not all doctors are aware of this disease and some have difficulty in diagnosing the problem. There are clinics available and the public may have access to them. Good Christian counsellors who are well informed will not only pray with and for you, but will give you practical advice as to how to manage stress. It is a long road but you have no alternative. If you are suffering from depression it is your responsibility to do something about finding help. You may contact the Depression & Anxiety Support Group for more information on 011/7831474 or 011/8841797 or 011/0800119283. You may also contact the Federation of Mental Health on 011/ 7255800.

## **MEDICATION**

Anti-anxiety medication can be a very beneficial tool, however not all medication is suitable to all patients. We are all made very differently, we come from a different genetic pool, we have our own set of circumstances, our self-image differs from that of another, and therefore it would be naïve to think that one tablet is suitable for all sufferers. Through protracted stress certain cells and chemicals are burnt out. They need to be replaced. The body has difficulty in coping without them but the cells of your body are like people who learn to cope with pressures independent of others. They become suspicious of any stranger. The body therefore may reject some of the chemicals that are put into your system through prescribed medication. It takes 14 days for some medication to take effect and to be "welcomed" by the rest of the cells. But once this happens you will begin to function normally. Many wonder drugs come in families. Some of them may not be compatible with other medication. Therefore a skilful diagnostic doctor will help to determine the best route.

## Tricyclics

The basic effect of this group of anti-depressants is that it increases the amount of serotonic or norephinephrine in the synaps. Some of the more commonly used antidepressants are: amitriptyline (Elavil, Trepiline, Tryptanol); clomipramine (Anafranil); desipramine (Norpramin, Pertofran); imipramine (Ethipramine, Tofranil); lofepramine (Emdalen); nortriptyline (Aventyl) trimipramine (Surmontil, Tydamine).

The tricyclics are commonly the first drugs that are prescribed for depression. Some of them do have side effects. These side effects include, drowsiness, dry mouth, nausea, blurred vision, and dizziness. It is important to note that tricyclics **ARE NOT ADDICTIVE**. They will not intoxicate, stimulate or make you feel high. Because of its complex bi-chemical nature one no-one should undertake chemotherapy without careful supervision of one or more trained physicians.

CI-LIFT; ZOLOFT, CIPRAMIL, and LITHIUM are very well used forms of medication that you may acquire from your doctor or chemist. For sleep Stilknox or Zopimed are well known tablets that are not sleeping tablets, but medication designed to restore your sleeping pattern.

### GUIDELINES FOR YOUR DIET:

1. Energy Foods:
  - (a) Use whole-wheat flour and buy brown bread instead of white bread.
  - (b) Eat cooked porridge instead of breakfast cereals.
  - (c) Use samp or pearled wheat instead of white rice.
  - (d) Avoid luxuries such as cake, biscuits, rusks, sweets, potato chips and cooldrink, and use margarine and spreads sparingly on bread.
  - (e) Use only a little oil in the preparation of food.
2. Body Building Foods:
  - (a) Use skimmed milk
  - (b) Do not use creamers, milk blends, and condensed milk.
  - (c) Buy meat with less fat and bone.
  - (d) Use fish (also tinned), chicken, eggs, dried beans, lentils, or soya products instead of meat.
  - (e) Add dried beans, lentils or soya products to meat and chicken dishes to make it go further.
  - (f) Restrict buying tinned meat and cold meats, such as polony and viennas.
  - (g) Cook soup from dried beans, peas or lentils.

You could consult your pharmacist or doctor for supplements that could address your fatigue and lack of energy. Useful supplements are those rich in vitamin B, vitamin C, and Calcium. A depression sufferer can also provide for the additional intake of Magnesium since it alleviates anxiety and also assists in the lifting of depression. It can also take away the craving for sweet things.

Thus the depression sufferer and his/her family must be vigilant to see that disturbances in eating patterns are rectified as soon as possible. Care must be taken in the dietary requirements since medication on its own will not make the person well. I cannot overemphasise that this process will require much love, patience, caring and warmth towards the depression sufferer by his family and support team.

### SLEEP:

- A. Lack of sleep makes you tired and listless and aggravates depression.
- B. Too much sleep also worsens depression.
- C. It is necessary for you to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning.
- D. If you do not get to sleep at your regular time, you will still feel much better if you get up at your regular time.
- E. Shift working is not good for a depression sufferer.

### **Guidelines on how to ensure a good night's sleep**

1. Avoid caffeine, which is a stimulant. It is not only coffee and tea that contain caffeine. There is enough caffeine in chocolate, certain soft drinks and some painkillers that interfere with sleep.
2. Avoid the use of nicotine two to three hours before bedtime.
3. Avoid the use of alcohol.
4. Eat on a regular basis and avoid a heavy meal prior to going to bed.
5. Be certain that you have an adequate calcium intake.
6. Exercise daily. But avoid strenuous activity before going to bed.
7. Develop a daily routine so that your body knows when it is time to go to sleep.
8. Prevent yourself from sleeping late or taking long naps during the day.
9. Have a pre-bedtime ritual such as washing up, getting into night clothes, and reading. It tells you body it is time to go to sleep.
10. Consider sex for relaxation.
11. Your bedroom temperature between 18 and 22 degrees Celsius
12. Make sure your sleeping space is neither noisy nor light. It must be reserved for sleeping and sex only.

### **If there is a disturbance in sleeping patterns – take action.**

See your health care professional as soon as your sleeping pattern has been disturbed. This action is vital to prevent the pain and suffering of an episode of deep depression. Psychiatrists and medical doctors in private practice and the psychiatric hospitals judiciously use medication for sleep. So no matter what medication you receive, it will still depend on how you handle your own sleep disturbance.

Here are some hints to stabilise your sleep:

1. Use relaxation exercises to put yourself to sleep, If you wake up at night you can repeat the exercises on audiocassette.
2. Focus your attention on your breathing and repeat "in" and "out" as you breathe.
3. You can play soothing music on a cassette -recorder that shuts off automatically.
4. Take a warm shower or hot bath.
5. You could read a non-stimulating book or watch a serene television programme before you go to bed.
6. If you cannot sleep, do not fret about it. That will only make it worse. Relax and focus your attention on pleasant thoughts.

### **TIME MANAGEMENT**

This is very useful when you are in a deep state of depression. It becomes necessary to make a daily plan, particularly for that part of the day, which is most difficult for you. Time management can be done with your support group. You must write down what you plan to do and when. But you must not expect too much from yourself. This plan will help you to stay focussed and you will be in control of your actions.

Guidelines to planning a day:

Leisure	
Family Life	
Work	
Miscellaneous	

## **COMMUNICATION**

What is communication?

Good communication is .... talking, sending messages and giving information to another person in such a way that the other person understands what you are saying. Give clear messages.

Good communication is ... listening, not giving advice, not telling the other person why he shouldn't feel that way, not doing something to solve his problem.

It is important to listen actively.

Good communication is understanding, accepting another's feelings. Behind words often lie feelings. Feelings, a spontaneous inner reaction to a person, place or thing, are facts, neither right nor wrong. Always search for greater understanding of each other. Be sensitive to the other person's feelings and needs.

Real communication is ... Sharing your thoughts, feelings, needs and expectations with the person you love. It is important to risk openness while also keeping the feelings of the other in mind.

How do we communicate?

Verbally (through words) and non-verbally (through tone of voice, facial expression and body language.)

### **BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION:**

- ❖ Uncontrolled emotions
- ❖ Self-centredness
- ❖ Lack of understanding
- ❖ Unrealistic expectations

How to communicate effectively:

1. Choose the right time.
2. Make eye-contact with the speaker
3. Check that you are hearing exactly what the other person is trying to say. Ask questions.
4. Use I – messages. State how the problem makes you feel and the effect it has on you.
5. Relax your hands and keep the tone of your voice low.
6. Give a non-blaming description of the problem.
7. Speak clearly. Be specific, positive, non-defensive.
8. Do not label the other person, attack him personally or call him names.
9. Do not say “you always ....”, “you never.....”.
10. Do not refer to the past. Let bygones be bygones.
11. Do not try to prove the other person wrong. There need not be a winner or a loser. You can both win!

## **IMPROVING YOUR SELF-ESTEEM**

When you are depressed, then your self-esteem declines. You have feelings of worthlessness; hopelessness and generally you have a low opinion of yourself. This creates a negative thought pattern that makes you sink into a deeper depression. The following activities are suggested by Copeland, which should be incorporated in your daily schedule. It can be used especially on those days when you are feeling very low or down on yourself:

1. Do something that you can enjoy and that you know will make you feel better about yourself.
2. Do something that makes you laugh.
3. Do something that you like
4. Do something special for a friend.
5. Pretend that you are your own best friend.
6. Make a list of your own particular accomplishments in a day, a week or a month in your life.
7. Humour yourself by setting aside a space to honour yourself.
8. Have pictures of yourself in prominent places all around your home.
9. Look at a child then think of all the good things you would be happy to tell that child about him or herself.
10. Get together with a member of your support team and share the time together. You then take turns to tell each other everything that is good about yourselves.
11. Ask yourself what you want and need. Be your own best friend. You deserve it.
12. Have a celebration. Celebrate anything you have achieved, e.g. The fact that you got up, made the bed, took the children to school, bought the groceries, washed the car.

### **BITTERNESS VRS FORGIVENESS**

We need to forgive others so Satan cannot take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:10,11). We are commanded to get rid of all bitterness in our lives and forgive others as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:31,32). Ask God to bring to your mind the people you need to forgive by praying the following prayer out loud:

*Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance, and patience toward me, knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance. I confess that I have not shown that same kindness and patience toward those who have hurt me. Instead, I have held on to my anger, bitterness and resentment toward them. Please bring to my mind all the people I need to forgive in order that I may do so now in Jesus' Name, Amen. (See Romans 2:4)*

On a separate sheet of paper, list the names of people who come to your mind. At this point don't question whether you need to forgive them or not. If a name comes to mind, just write it down. Often we hold things against ourselves as well, punishing ourselves for wrong choices we've made in the past. Write "myself" at the bottom of your list so you can forgive yourself. Forgiving yourself is accepting the truth that God has already forgiven you in Christ. If God forgives you, you can forgive yourself!

Also write down "thoughts against God" at the bottom of your list. Obviously, God has never done anything wrong so we don't have to forgive Him. Sometimes, however, we harbour angry thoughts against Him because He did not do what we wanted Him to do. Those feelings of anger or resentment against God can become a wall between us and Him so we must let them go.

Before you begin working through the process of forgiving those on your list, take a few minutes to review what forgiveness is and what it is not.

*Forgiveness is not forgetting.* People who want to forget all that was done to them will find they cannot do it. Don't put off forgiving those who have hurt you, hoping the pain will one day go away. Once you choose to forgive someone, then Christ can come and begin to heal you of your hurts. But the healing cannot begin until you first forgive.

*Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of your will.* Since God requires you to forgive, it is something you can do. Sometimes it is very hard to forgive someone because we naturally want revenge for the things we have suffered. Forgiveness seems to go against our sense of what is right and fair. So we hold on to our anger, punishing people over and over again in our minds for the pain they've caused us.

But we are told by God never to take our own revenge (*Romans 12:19*). Let God deal with the person. Let him or her off your hook because as long as you refuse to forgive someone, you are still hooked to that person. You are still chained to your past, bound up in your bitterness. By forgiving, you let the other person off your hook, but he or she is not off God's hook. You must trust that God will deal with the person justly and fairly, something you simply cannot do.

"But you don't know how much this person hurt me!" you say. You're right. We don't, but Jesus does, and He tells you to forgive. And don't you see? Until you let go of your anger and hatred, the person is still hurting you. You can't turn back the clock and change the past but you can be free from it. You can stop the pain, but there is only one way to do it – forgive. *Forgive others for your sake so you can be free.* Forgiveness is mainly a matter of obedience to God. God wants you to be free; there is no other way.

*Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin.* You are going to live with those consequences anyway whether you like it or not, so the only choice you have is whether you will do so in the bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness. No one truly forgives without accepting and suffering the pain of another person's sin. That can seem unfair and you may wonder where the justice is in it, but justice is found at the cross, which makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus took the eternal consequences of sin upon Himself. God "*made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). We, however, often suffer the temporary consequences of other people's sins. That is simply a harsh reality of life all of us have to face.

*Do not wait for the other person to ask for your forgiveness.* Remember, Jesus did not wait for those who were crucifying Him to apologise before He forgave them. Even while they mocked and jeered at Him, He prayed, "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" (*Luke 23:34*)

*Forgive from your heart.* Allow God to bring to the surface the painful emotions you feel toward those who've hurt you. If your forgiveness doesn't touch the emotional core of your life, it will be incomplete. Too often we're afraid of the pain so we bury our emotions deep inside us. Let God bring them to the surface so He can begin to heal those damaged emotions.

*Forgiveness is choosing not to hold someone's sin against him or her any more.* It is common for bitter people to bring up past issues with those who have hurt them. They want them to feel bad. But we must let go of the past and choose to reject any thought of revenge. This doesn't mean you continue to put up with the future sins of others. God does not tolerate sin and neither should you. Don't allow yourself to be continually abused by others. Take a stand against sin while continuing to exercise grace and forgiveness toward those who hurt you. IF you need help setting wise limits and boundaries to protect yourself from further abuse, talk to a trusted friend, counsellor, or pastor.

*Don't wait until you feel like forgiving.* You will never get there. Make the hard choice to forgive even if you don't feel like it. Once you choose to forgive, Satan will have lost his power over you in that area, and God's healing touch will be free to move. Freedom is what you will gain right now, not necessarily an immediate change in feelings.

Now you are ready to begin. Starting with the first person on your list, make the choice to forgive him or her for every painful memory that comes to your mind. Stay with that individual until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain. Then work your way down the list in the same way.

As you begin forgiving people, God may bring to your mind painful memories you've totally forgotten. Let Him do this even if it hurts. God wants you to be free; forgiving those people is the only way. Don't try to excuse the offender's behaviour, even if it is someone you are really close to.

Don't say "Lord, please help me to forgive." He is already helping you and will be with you all the way through the process. Don't say, "Lord, I want to forgive..." because that bypasses the hard choice we have to make. Say, "Lord, I choose to forgive ..."

For every painful memory you have for each person on your list, pray out loud:

*Lord, I choose to forgive (name the person) for (what they did) even though it made me feel (share the painful feelings.)*

After you have forgiven each person for all the offenses that came to your mind, and after you have honestly expressed how you felt, conclude your forgiveness of that person by praying out loud:

*Lord, I choose not to hold any of these things against (name) any longer. I thank You for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness toward (name). I now ask You to bless (name) In Jesus' name I pray. Amen*

### ***The ABC of Salvation***

**Admit that you are a sinner in need of a Saviour.**

**Believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is your personal Saviour.**

**Confess with your lips and believe in your heart that God has raised Christ from the dead and you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)**

For more information visit our Website [www.stmarks.org.za](http://www.stmarks.org.za)

e-mail: [gracelin@intekom.co.za](mailto:gracelin@intekom.co.za) Tel: 041/3606060

For further reading "Freedom From Fear" By Neil T. Anderson & Rich Miller

## What is depression?

Depression is a severely disabling condition that has a profound effect on all aspects of a sufferer's life. By the year 2020 it will be the No. 2 cause of disability worldwide (WHO).

Depression is one of the most common of all psychiatric disorders. At least one in six adults will suffer from depression at any given time.

Depression is viewed as an illness that is caused by changes in neurotransmitters in the limbic system of the brain. These changes can be triggered by numerous factors such as stressful life events, illness such as heart attacks or viral infections, childbirth, strokes and head injuries.

Depression in the 21st century is a treatable condition with an excellent response rate.



