

By Lacy Wolff, ERS Health Promotion Administrator



For many of us, the holiday season can feel like there are more things on our to-do list than we have time for. Also, if you are in public service (hello, this is all of us!), you may be more susceptible to compassion fatigue than the general population.

One of our webinars during the [2021 State Employee Wellness Fair](#) featured two attorneys, Erica Grigg and Kristen Huff. Having experienced extreme levels of burnout and compassion fatigue themselves, both of them shared their personal stories, and recommendations for recognizing burnout and managing it in our lives. Here are a few key takeaways, definitions, and strategies I want to share:

1. Burnout is defined as exhaustion of emotional and/or physical strength as a result of prolonged stress or frustration. Symptoms of burnout include feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, drained, demoralized or ineffective.
2. Compassion fatigue is burnout combined with physical, emotional and psychological effects resulting from exposure to others' traumatic experiences, known as "secondary traumatic stress." This can include exposure to traumatic content of clients' stories, heavy caseloads, inadequate support or supervision, inadequate time to process trauma, and lack of control over time.

There are strategies to increase resilience and more effectively handle the stress and trauma you face.

1. **Kristen and Erica described burnout as a disease of disengagement.** Not surprisingly then, connection is one of the best ways to build resilience and combat burnout and compassion fatigue. Isolation can lead to loneliness and depression. Talk about your experiences and feelings with someone you trust. (And remember, [your HealthSelect plan covers mental health counseling](#). Mental health virtual visits scheduled with Dr. on Demand or MD Live have \$0 copay for HealthSelect of Texas participants.)
2. **Say no to unnecessary tasks, media, news, and social media** that create more stress in your life. It is a choice.
3. **Cultivate your creativity and spirituality.** Find a hobby that uses different parts of your brain. A great analogy that was used in the webinar is that of a weight lifter who only lifts upper body weights and never works out the legs, resulting in a huge chest and tiny, spindly legs. If you only work one part of the brain, the others will atrophy and age faster.
4. **Laugh! Laughter is medicine for the body.** Think of things that you enjoy. Watch a comedy show. Tell jokes. Let go a little.
5. **Practice gratitude and meditation.** We are focusing on building a gratitude practice for the entire month of December with morning check-ins and opportunities to connect and share your gratitude with others. If you want to learn more about meditation, please watch the Wellness Fair webinar featuring [Jon Krop, J.D.: Mindfulness Methods: Cultivating calm, focus and well-being](#). He did an excellent job of simplifying an ancient practice that has countless benefits for physical and mental health.

Making time for yourself for these self-care practices can help you prevent and alleviate burnout. Listen to Erica and Kristen's full webinar through the [Managing Burnout & Compassion Fatigue Webinar Link](#).