

Ep. 16 The best 15 tips to prevent and overcome burnout in 2021.

Part 1: My top 5 (Transcription)

1. Overrate your sleep

Because one of the most important tools your body needs to break the circle of chronic stress and bring homeostasis (or balance) back into your system is through good quality sleep. Moreover, sleep deprivation and poor sleep is linked with deterioration of the short-term memory and longer-term cognitive decline, including the development of dementia and Alzheimer's dementia.

But what is good quality sleep? Well, the key determinants of [quality sleep](#) include:

- Sleeping at least 85 percent of the total time you spent in bed
- Falling asleep in 30 minutes or less
- Waking up no more than once per night; and being awake for 20 minutes or less after initially falling asleep. This means that if you wake up try to keep it as shortly as possible.

A good way to keep an eye to your sleep pattern is to get a sleep tracker. I prefer those that monitor your heart rate as well because this is also gives you more information about your overall health. More on heart rate and heart rate variability will follow this coming year.

There are many factors that can affect your sleep quality like children that wake you up, noise, light, using your cell phone or your computer before going to bed. The mood you are in before sleeping can also affect your sleep like when you are stressed out, tired, and agitated after a tough day. The amount of adrenaline in your body will affect detrimentally the quality of your sleep. Remember that chronic stress becomes chronic because we fail to break its vicious circle and we need to be resilient in this world and to build resilience we need to give us the opportunity to recharge fully at night. So, make this your number one priority this year. And for those who have small children that keep you awake at night, learn how to do power naps during the day 7 to 8 hours before going to bed. A power nap should not be longer than 20-25 minutes, so you will not wake up feeling groggy and it will help you keep your energy until your child sleeps through the whole night. Ask someone to keep an eye on the baby for twenty minutes or even better, nap when the baby naps. Forget about the housekeeping. Remember: your health is a priority.

I have gathered some links for you that you will find in my website www.escapeburnoutsociety.com like the link to:

- Sleepfoundation.org
- The documentary "Mysteries of Sleep" <https://wgbh.cimediacloud.com/r/1epUdoovToax>
- TED talk **Sleep is your superpower** by Matt Walker <https://youtu.be/5MuIMqhT8DM> Who explains in a masterful way how sleep is terribly underrated in our modern society.

2. Avoid alcohol before sleeping and diminish drinking coffee but the best is to stop at all.

The more stressed you are, the least coffee and alcohol you must drink. Let's talk first about alcohol. If you are someone who will take a drink or two to knock you down when you want to relax and sleep, don't do it! Drinking alcohol will calm you a bit but it will also shorten the amount of time you spend in deep sleep and the next morning you will feel everything but fresh. Just to give you an idea I will

mention a study carried out by Julia Pietilä, (a Finish researcher) which was [published](#) in the journal *JMIR Mental Health*. (<https://mental.jmir.org/2018/1/e23/>).

She found that even as little as one drink was shown to impair sleep quality. Moderate alcohol consumption lowered restorative sleep quality by 24 percent, and high alcohol intake by as much as 39.2 percent. So almost 40 percent of the quality of your restorative sleep will be affected by some alcoholic drinks in the evening. When you have a burnout or are very close to have one, what you need is to sleep well and do not interfere with this important recovery moment.

I remind you that all the links will be in my website www.escapeburnoutsociety.com under the posts. As you can see, if you want to have a sound sleep you should avoid alcohol as much as possible.

Now about coffee and caffeinated drinks... Although there are persons who are more sensitive to caffeine than others what is true is that coffee is a stimulant that elevates the level of cortisol in the blood. Studies in humans have shown that caffeine increases cortisol at rest, and that levels of cortisol after caffeine consumption are similar to those experienced during an acute stress. Drinking coffee, in other words, re-creates stress conditions for the body and that is the last thing you want to do when you have a burnout.

Moreover, the chronic elevations of cortisol secretion have implications for long-term health because it alters the immune-system response and its long-term elevation is associated with depression.

More bad news about caffeine is that chronic caffeine consumption increases insulin resistance, a situation in which the body cannot effectively deliver glucose into the cells of the body. In this situation, insulin, which helps transport glucose into the cells, cannot do its job well because the body's cells are less receptive. So if you combine the standard Western diet: high in refined carbohydrates with stress and a high caffeine intake, then you have a potential recipe for metabolic disaster and one detrimental effect of this disease is obesity.

So you might need this stimulant to start your day but your body cortisol levels are naturally high early in the morning. This is our natural way of waking up so it is a bad sign if you can't feel alert without a cup of coffee in the morning. The more you need coffee the more should avoid it until you are fitter and have a good restoring sleep and diminish your stress levels. You might say that you are tolerant for caffeine and some heavy drinkers do develop a partial tolerance but this doesn't include all the effects of caffeine.

I found a peer-reviewed article by W. R. Lovallo and others published in 2005 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2257922/>) that showed that daily caffeine intake causes a partial but not complete tolerance to caffeine's effects on cortisol secretion.

It comes all down to the amount of extra stress your body have to deal with when the quality of your sleep is bad, you drink alcoholic drinks to relax and you have long stressful days. This is a short cut to burnout.

3. Learn a breathing technique to help you recover and to relax.

Any technique will help you because breathing is not only essential for getting the oxygen, we need to survive but it is also a basic need our nervous system has been programmed to demand and therefore, receiving every breath, calms us naturally. I want to share this thought that Dr. Daniel J. Siegel wrote about breathing in his book *Aware, The Science and practice of Presence* I am quoting: "There is a certain coherence that breath awareness creates, which is likely due to the repeating pattern of the inhalation and the exhalation, the in-breath and the out-breath, as anticipating something and then something arriving is deeply satisfying and grounding. It can give life a sense of being predictable and reliable." How wonderful and simple, don't you think?

Breath is a need that gets immediately satisfied and by being aware of this, we relax. I think this is a clear explanation of the simplicity of breathing and explains why any kind of exercise that makes us aware of our breathing, will help us to relax and lower our cortisone levels.

So give you a break daily to breathe. I interviewed Monica Peon who is an Iyengar Yoga teacher, this was episode 15, and she said: if you master your breath you can master your mind. Who doesn't want to this! So start today! If you want to try some quite simple techniques try this: Breathe in for 4 counts, hold the breath for 7 counts, and exhale for 8 counts.

Ready? So, breathe 1-2-3-4, hold 1-2-3-4-5-6-7, exhale 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 and repeat.

Repeat this a few times until you feel relaxation.

Investing time in finding a technique that works for you is an essential tool to defeat burnout. Check my website for the post with some links where you can find simple breathing exercises like the one I just mentioned. This one I found at the www.adrenalfatiguesolution.com

4. Engage in physical activity every day

As someone who has been physically very active her entire life, I can tell you that I had to learn the hard way how to reach a balance between physical activity and rest. In my most active years I would train five to six times a week. I would run, bike, swim and go to the gym. I got overtrained once and learned to periodize my efforts. Eventually I became a running instructor and since then I help people to train wisely. Now I am happy I spent so much time in building a strong body but when my professional career got too demanding and I became a mom I had to dramatically decrease the amount of time I spent sporting. I went from 5 days of sport to hardly one or two, and I can tell you this is not enough to even maintain our muscles after our fourth decade. I have talked with many men and women about this radical change in our lifestyles when we pass our third decade. We are torn apart in pieces by the burnout society and we find little time to take care of ourselves. Work and children become a priority that usually sends our health to the last priority we care about. Until you get sick.

So I will explain how the vicious circle works and how to get out of it. It starts with a lack of regular physical activity and by this I don't mean cleaning the house or repairing your car, I mean a cardiovascular effort longer than 25 minutes a day or taking 10,000 steps a day. If this is not in your system when you are in your second decade you will find it even more difficult to do it when you hit your forties. But by that time many people have children and a demanding career. Women are heading the menopause and men levels of testosterone begin to decrease notoriously. Here is where you get caught up in a vicious circle because your energy levels drop dramatically, your stress levels go up and you don't prioritize to get enough time for physical activity and enough rest. To get active you need stimulants like caffeinated drinks and to relax you also need alcohol or pills.

Exercise is not only a way to preserve our muscle body mass that drops after our forties it is essential to our health. You have been caught in the downward spiral of being dependent on pills and drugs and the number of pills will only increase with age.

I recommend you to read an article that appeared in the Scientific American in 2019 by Herman Pontzer. It's called: "Humans evolved to exercise. Unlike our ape cousins, humans require high levels of physical activity to be healthy" The link to the summary of this article is available in my website under my posts.

I will quote from this article: "Although we've long known exercise is good for us, it appears that it's good for every organ system even down to the cellular level. Our brains have evolved to reward prolonged physical activity with endocannabinoids which is where the so-called runner's high comes

from. Many have argued that exercise helped enable the massive expansion of the human brain to the point where we require physical activity for normal brain development. Exercise releases molecules that promote neurogenesis and brain growth, as well as improve memory and stave off cognitive decline in old age.” So, are you not putting your shoes on right now to take a walk?

Daily exercise might help you to maintain your weight depending on your diet, but the most important aspect of exercise is to promote the wellbeing of our brain, to activate our muscles and activate circulation.

So break the circle: stop using stimulants, start walking if you can't do any other exercise because you are tired and burnt out. With time you will be able to do more and get those 25 minutes of daily exercise or those 10000 steps. Get you a good rest at night and your body will do the rest.

5. Meditate

I can't stop considering meditation one of my top five advises for people to prevent burnout. I think that meditation brings so many benefits that everybody should give it a try. I have interviewed Karen Newell and Dr. Eben Alexander in episode 14 where we talked about meditation with binaural sounds. These sounds are specially designed to help you tune out from distracting factors and tune in to your inner world. Karen also talked about guided meditations as the best way to start. Dr. Alexander explained briefly how meditation has helped him to regain access to the altered state he experienced when he suffered a devastating infection that led him to an almost deadly coma for a week. This event changed his vision about consciousness and science forever. If you are interested, please listen to episode 14 and check the description of this podcast in my website [www. scapeburnoutsociety.com](http://www.scapeburnoutsociety.com). There you find the links for Karen's and Eben websites.

For people who are looking for more practical information about meditation I have gathered this for you. It is based on my personal experience.

You can consider meditation as a training for your brain, but you shouldn't expect to achieve immediately something because like in any kind of training, you will need some time to feel the results. Moreover, your expectation will distract you from being present which is one important aspect of meditation.

If you think that the goal of meditation is to stop thinking I can tell you this is not going to be the case. Cessation of thoughts is something you can leave for the Buddha, okey? You are not failing in any way if you can't stop thinking. Just agree with me that the unstoppable chatter in your mind can be very annoying specially when is full of disturbing/unsetting thoughts.

Guided meditations will help you lead your thoughts in a mental journey to a desired state of mind while mindfulness will make you more aware of the present moment. There are many kinds of meditation techniques from counting with every breath from zero to 100 and back to paying attention to each part of your body. There is for sure a technique for you. Just remember that there can't be goals set like you could do when you go to the gym. Practicing is the goal and by doing it you will change your brain.

When you meditate is very normal to have thoughts, but the idea is to start observing your thoughts happen and to disengage from them because those thoughts bring emotions, and those emotions trigger all kinds of chemical reactions in your body. When, for example, you have anxious thoughts of things that did not go well or things that should not happen in the future, then you spent all this time producing cortisol. As you might already know, cortisol is a hormone produced when our body experiences stress and that it is a useful hormone in small amounts but detrimental to our health if we are continuously releasing it. But why do you release cortisol even you are not anymore having a discussion with someone? This is because your mind can't tell the difference between the real moment and the thought you constantly recreate in your mind about that moment that happened or, that you think it will happen. So, meditating helps you firstly to learn to detach yourself from this thoughts and emotions for a while. Then later, when you feel a bit more comfortable with meditation, you can try to create positive thoughts in your mind and adapt your emotions to them upgrading in this way the chemistry in your body. Because your mind will believe these thoughts are happening and if you visualize peacefulness, your body will lower the cortisol levels according to the degree of peacefulness you are creating in your mind. This holds for all pleasant and positive feelings you can have. As far as

you visualize positive things and feel constructive emotions, your brain will get the signal that the threat is gone and that it is time to relax and to recover. As easy as that.

Of course, there are many kinds of meditation and we could say that each kind will take you to a different place in yourself. You don't have to go anywhere you don't want to, but I broadly advise you to spend quality time with yourself because many answers you are looking for are in your unconscious mind, they are within your reach, but you have to ignore all the chatter of your busy mind and access your unconscious mind.

That is, part of your mind that you can't easily access because you can't remember most of the things that you have stored there. According to Freud (founder of the psychoanalysis), the unconscious mind is the primary source of human behavior. Our feelings, motives and decisions are powerfully influenced by our past experiences and stored in the unconscious. Many things of our childhood are stored there, and they influence our daily behavior for good but also for bad.

It is possible to reprogram yourself through meditation, but you will first need to observe your thoughts and quiet your mind a bit. A practice of only 15 minutes a day changes the brain structure and gives you benefits as improved concentration and an enhanced short-term memory. I will quote from a literature research by Hari Sharma that has a lot of citations to many other scientific researches on meditation so check this out in my website if you are interested. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4895748/>).

I quote: "Research has confirmed a myriad of **health benefits** associated with the practice of meditation. These include stress reduction, decreased anxiety, decreased depression, reduction in pain (both physical and psychological), improved memory, and increased efficiency at work. **Physiological benefits** include reduced blood pressure, reduced heart rate, reduced levels of lactate and cortisol...and the list goes on with many other chemical substances that are detrimental to our health. This article also says: "Meditation increases the blood flow in the brain, what improves the attention and concentration ability. With aging, the brain cortical thickness (gray matter, which contains our neurons) decreases, whereas meditation experience is associated with an increase in gray matter in the brain therefore, having an anti-aging effect on the brain. A study investigating the effect of meditation on the aging process in the body showed that long-term meditators have a significantly younger biological age compared to short-term meditators and controls.

So, as you can see, meditation is more than a hype. I dare to say that it will become one of the healthiest practices that we will be adopting in the years to come. It is not only healthy, but it also helps us break free from pain and painful emotions, it makes us more human and it is for free. This were the first top five advices. Go to my website and leave a comment if you want. I would really like to know what kind of content you would like to hear in my podcast and to read in my posts. Go to www.escapebrunoutsociety.com I am Gabriela Guzman. Thank you for listening.