Asking EPSP: How do you prevent, or minimize the effects of, burnout? What steps do you take to maintain a healthy work/life balance?
Edited by Kate Potter Leary and Claire Masteller

“Why can’t I get this mundane stuff done?
Because I’m burned out.

Why am I burned out?
Because I’ve internalized the idea that I should be working all the time.

Why have I internalized that idea?
Because everything and everyone in my life has reinforced it...”
Anne Helen Peterson, Buzzfeed News

Our jobs as academics are busy. We juggle a lot of different responsibilities at work and at home, and sometimes, it all becomes too much. At the same time, prevalent in academic culture is the idea that we should be working all the time. That pressure, paired with the
mounting responsibilities as you advance in both your career and your personal life is a recipe for burning out.

**So what do we mean by burnout?**
Burnout is a state of emotional or physical exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. As the stress continues, you can lose interest and motivation to complete tasks. Burnout can reduce productivity, sap your energy, induce anxiety and frustration, and even have physical symptoms, including tension and fatigue. These effects can leave us feeling powerless, making it hard to complete even the simplest tasks.

So how can we prevent these feelings of burnout and balance our work life with the rest of our life in an effective and healthy way?

1. Identify the signs of burnout for you
   The best way to combat burnout is to first recognize when you have it. Burnout can look at feel different for everyone, so self reflection is important to identifying when you’re experiencing burnout.

   *Sean Bemis* @BemisGeology · Mar 13
   Replying to @AGU_EPSP

   For one, I take the habits of others with a grain of salt. We all have different life circumstances, so I try not to allow the benefits that others maintain to affect my self-perceptions. That said, I do try to get up before the rest of the family to exercise a few days a week...

2. Prioritize recovery and set limits for yourself

   Be realistic about what you can accomplish and where you’re out mentally and emotionally.
(3) Self-reflection and changing your mindset
Burnout can be a vicious cycle. The more burned out you are, the less productive you are during your work hours. The less you get done, the more pressure you put on yourself to spend even more time at work, feeding the burnout you’re already experiencing.

Dr. Adam R. Mangel @DrHydrogeofizz · Mar 13
Replies to @AGU_EPSP

the first step is realizing that this isn’t going to be a smooth curve, you will get buried at times, but the most important thing to do is to tackle things one at a time. The second most important thing is to enjoy the victories and #treatyoself because these will be fleeting.

(4) Normalize a more forgiving (and realistic!) academic culture
This one’s a doozy, and a community effort.

The role of social media here is huge. Sharing your experiences and the realities of an academic career can be helpful to others and combat the
“you must be working all the time” mentality. At the same time, it helps to commiserate with others that in the same place. Trust me, almost everyone hits a burnout point at some time in their careers - it’s inevitable.

Some strategies to combat burnout
The EPSP twitter community graciously shared some strategies for combating burnout but this is not an exhaustive list! These are just some ideas, if you have other strategies that work, you do you. And of course feel free to @ us on twitter with your burnout combatting strategies!

Claire Masteller @ccmasteller · Mar 13
(2/n) I started my postdoc 3 weeks after defending, moved to a new country, returned to the US for AGU <a month later, prepped & interviewed for a TT job that Jan./Feb., negotiated that March, EGU in April & then immediately went to the field - basically nonstop, high stress

Claire Masteller @ccmasteller · Mar 13
(3/n) in May, I BROKE. Literally had no energy/bandwidth for anything anymore!

Looking back, I was putting wayyy too much pressure on myself to do everything all at once, and I could have (1) said no, (2) reassessed some deadlines, and (3) taken a BREAK.

Claire Masteller @ccmasteller · Mar 13
(4/n) It took me ~3 months to fully recover.

Mostly because it took me ~3 months to recognize the problem, give myself permission to take a REAL vacation and to not work on the weekend, and to start blocking out time to exercise and do other things I enjoy.
1. SLEEP

Dr. Anjali Fernandes @climbing_ripple · Mar 14
Replying to @AGU_EPSP
Sleep, food, time outdoors. In that order. Sleep deprivation (long hours/ stress-triggered insomnia) is a good indicator of impending burnout with me. I am more productive and just happier, when I prioritize these 3. Spending time with people I like is a close #4

Kate Potter Leary @astoldbywater · Mar 13
Replying to @AGU_EPSP
Remember to rest! Treat yo self to some 😴💤💤💤

christine liu 🌿 two photon art @christineliuart
Your body and brain do so many amazing things during rest.

Rest is productive! Sometimes you get the most done by doing nothing at all 😊 twitter.com/kenziebrenna/s...
Show this thread

2. Laughter

José Constantine @MeanderingJose · Mar 13
Replying to @AGU_EPSP
I have to say that I’ve been more imperfect than most, but finding excuses to laugh has been key to me avoiding burnout. Oh yeah. And sleep. Let’s not forget sleep. #WisdomWednesday

Kate Potter Leary @astoldbywater · Mar 13
Yes, laughter! Laughing-- either at the thing causing me burnout or at a fun podcast or just goofing with friends-- really helps with my burnout.
3. Scheduling time away from your job

Sean Bemis @BemisGeology · Mar 13

And I completely unplug with the family every summer for the @oregoncfair - where I also get to catch up with @patton_cascadia! Time that is not life, nor work!

Claire Masteller @ccmasteller · Mar 13

(5/n)

TL;DR:

It's okay to take a break.
It's okay to say no.
It's okay to revise deadlines.
It's okay to take the time to develop a routine outside of work.
It's okay to spend time on other things you enjoy

These are things I learned the hard way!

4. Take care of yourself while at work

Matthew Morriss @RockIceandSnow · Mar 13

Replying to @AGU_EPSP

Taking one or several walks through the work day really helps me keep up the productivity during the day and what @StrubleWill mentioned: reading and leaving work email in the office.

Will Struble @StrubleWill · Mar 13

Replying to @AGU_EPSP

I get up a bit earlier so that I can dedicate time to reading (just for fun!) and for working out. I don't allow myself to check emails until I get to work (or I at least try). Starting the mornings doing very non-stressful things helps eliminate burnout through the whole day.
Always remember…

You are not alone in this. We all suffer from burnout at one point or another. If you are struggling, take the time to treat yourself and recover. Need some extra love? Tweet at us (@AGU_EPSP) and we'll give you some virtual twitter hugs!

This blog post was borne out of AGU EPSP’s new #WisdomWednesday initiative on Twitter. See the full tweet thread [here](#) and look out for future #WisdomWednesday posts!