# Burnout, Boundaries and Wellbeing

Some pressure helps you focus. Too much for too long drains you. Boundaries, sleep and support keep you in the healthy zone.

**AFTER THIS GUIDE YOU CAN**

- Tell healthy stress from overload and burnout.
- Say no or not now with a clear, kind script.
- Protect sleep and other basics during busy weeks.
- Know when and where to get help.

## Key terms

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| **Stress** | The body's response to a demand. Short bursts can sharpen focus. |
| **Chronic stress** | Stress that stays high for weeks with little recovery. |
| **Burnout** | A state of exhaustion, detachment or cynicism, and a sense that your effort no longer works, after long stretches of overload. |
| **Boundary** | A limit you set on your time, energy or availability to protect what matters most. |
| **Saying not now** | Delaying a request to a time that fits your plan instead of refusing outright. |
| **Sleep hygiene** | Habits that support good sleep: steady times, a dark cool room, screens off before bed, little caffeine late in the day. |
| **Recovery** | Activities that restore energy: sleep, movement, time outdoors, time with people you trust. |
| **Counseling center** | Campus service offering free or low cost confidential support for stress, anxiety, depression and more. |
| **988** | The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the United States. Call or text any time. |
| **Support network** | The people and services you can lean on: friends, family, mentors, staff. |

## The big ideas

- Watch for early signs: poor sleep, short temper, dread, skipping meals, pulling away from people.

- Every yes spends energy. Before you agree, check your plan.
- A good no is short and kind: "I can't this week. Can I help Sunday instead?"
- Protect the basics first: sleep, food, movement. Most adults need 7 or more hours of sleep a night.
- Help early is easier than help late. Counseling centers are for ordinary stress too, not only emergencies.
- Look out for friends. If someone talks about not wanting to be here, ask directly and help them reach support.

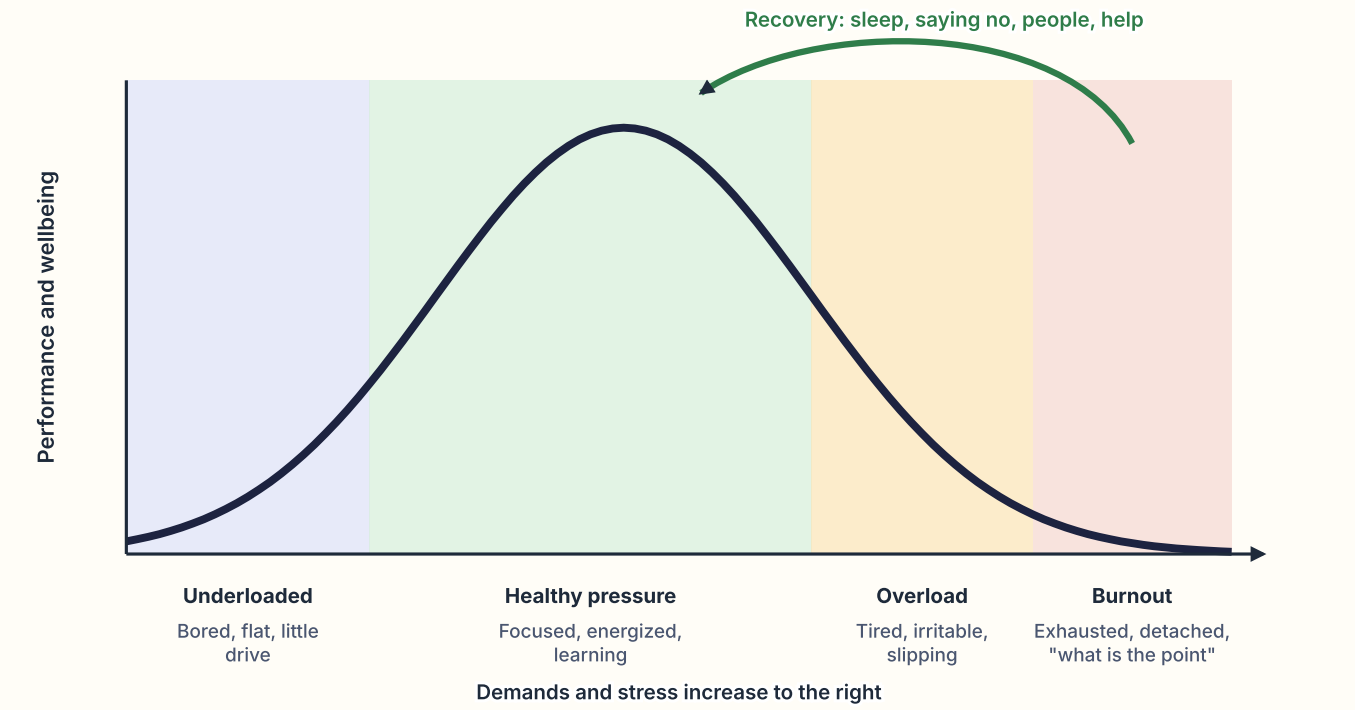


Figure. A simplified stress and performance curve.

## Worked example

**Week 11 at the Student Union. You have not slept a full night in a while. Twelve requests land at once: an extra shift, a group project meeting, a party, a friend who needs to talk, and more.**

1. Sort quickly: what is required (class, the project meeting), what is important to you (your friend Sam), and what is optional (the party, the extra shift).
2. Say yes to Sam first. A friend who says "I am not great" deserves real time.
3. Say no to the extra shift with a short script: "I can't pick it up this week, but ask me next week."
4. Say not now to the party, and protect two nights of full sleep.
5. Sam shares that things feel heavy. Listen, then walk with Sam to the counseling center or help them call. If there is any talk of suicide, call or text 988 together.

## Common mistakes

- Treating exhaustion as proof that you are working hard enough.
- Saying yes to everything to avoid letting anyone down.
- Cutting sleep first when the week gets busy.
- Waiting until a crisis to contact the counseling center.
- Changing the subject when a friend hints that they are struggling.

## Check yourself

1. Name two early warning signs of overload.
2. What three features describe burnout?
3. Write a short, kind way to decline a request.
4. How much sleep do most adults need?
5. Is the counseling center only for emergencies?
6. A friend says they wish they could disappear. What do you do?
7. Why is some stress useful?
8. Name two recovery activities.

## Answer key

1. **Any two: poor sleep, irritability, dread, skipped meals, pulling away.** Early signs are easier to fix.
2. **Exhaustion, detachment or cynicism, and feeling your effort no longer works.** It follows long stretches without recovery.
3. **Example: "I can't this week. Can I help Sunday instead?"** Short, honest, with an option if you have one.
4. **7 or more hours a night.** Teens need more.
5. **No.** It helps with everyday stress too.
6. **Ask directly about suicide, stay with them, and connect them to help such as 988.** Asking does not plant the idea.
7. **Moderate pressure can sharpen focus and effort.** The goal is the healthy zone, not zero stress.
8. **Any two: sleep, movement, time outdoors, time with trusted people.** Recovery is what moves you back to the healthy zone.

**Help is real.** If you or a friend are struggling, talk to your campus counseling center. In the United States you can call or text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) any time. Outside the US, contact your local crisis line.

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