

Prevent PT burnout with effective time management

IF YOU ARE ANYTHING LIKE MOST PERSONAL TRAINERS, you will probably have weeks when you feel tired, flat and uninspired and question whether personal training has a future for you. Most of us experience these feelings, better known as burnout. The key is to recognise burnout and adopt pro-active strategies to overcome it and prevent it in the future.

Like athletes, many personal trainers undertake large physical workloads and experience considerable psychological stresses over time. The long-term effects of such stress on athletes has been researched extensively and appropriate recovery and management strategies identified, but few reports have examined the effects of these stresses on trainers. The limited research that does exist focuses almost exclusively on the causes and identification of burnout with little or no consideration given to overuse and overtraining problems that trainers also experience. Moreover, these reports provide no recommendations for how trainers can maintain their multidimensional roles with minimum risk to their physical and psychological wellbeing. Ironically, the basic recovery strategies that trainers teach to their clients are the same ones that they should use for themselves.

Trainers are time poor

As trainers we have three major roles; delivering training sessions, managing a business and a private family life.

One of the major causes of excessive stress for trainers is being 'time poor'. We lack sufficient time to undertake the massive number of tasks required to fulfill our primary roles. Balancing commitments to all these roles requires exceptional planning and management skills. The best way to minimise the impact of excessive stress is to plan ahead and identify all commitments including appropriate recovery strategies for every day.

Time management simplified

A simple approach to weekly planning and time management is to use a burnout diagnostic chart to list and identify major tasks, demands and commitments (see below) that are then plotted onto a weekly planning template to represent different activities. Workloads may vary daily but each type of activity will result in a specific type of fatigue (even sitting down at a computer for 30 minutes or more can produce muscular, neural and visual fatigue). Recognising this will help you identify some recovery strategies to minimise that specific fatigue. This process takes about 5 to 10 minutes a week and helps to anticipate potentially stressful times. If you expect them and plan recovery practices around these periods, you often find that they don't turn out to be quite as stressful as you had imagined.

BURNOUT DIAGNOSTIC

	current	goal	
How many hours per week do you do face-to-face personal training?			
How many hours do you spend on other fitness work?			
How many hours do you do additional work such as admin?			
How many hours per week do you spend on business or personal development?			
How many hours per week do you spend on household duties?			
How many hours per week do you spend on family and personal relationships?			
Do you build any 'recovery' activities into your week?			
How many 'me' hours do you have per week? (E.g. time to reflect and relax)			
Are you eating a well-balanced, nutritious diet?			
Do you think you have a balance between work and personal time?			
If the balance is not there what three things can you do to change this?	1	2	3
How will you ensure you implement these changes?			



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The 'typical' trainer

Obviously all trainers are different, but many years of working with, and observing, fitness professionals have enabled me to create a profile of a 'typical' trainer. By filling in the burnout diagnostic chart on the previous page and taking your own personal circumstances into consideration, it is highly likely that this profile, and chart depicting a typical week for a full time trainer, will seem all too familiar.

- full time trainer, self employed
- late 20s with 2 to 3 years experience
- renting apartment with partner
- 25 to 30 sessions per week, one-on-one indoor and outdoor
- 3 group sessions per week outdoor
- instructs 1 spin class per week
- tired after work
- low in energy and sleeps in afternoon and at end of week
- often naps on couch in day and evening
- exhausted on saturday night, has no energy
- holidays 2 x per year, in January and mid year
- weights workout 3 x per week
- runs 2 x per week
- minimal stretching or injury prevention work
- minimal reading (Sunday paper some weeks)
- sore shoulder and knee some weeks - no treatment sought
- massage 2 to 3 times per year

TYPICAL WEEK FOR A FULL TIME TRAINER

MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
clients	clients	group	clients	clients	group	
					clients	
weights	run	weights	run	weights	home	
clients	free	clients	free	clients	admin	social and family
admin	admin	admin	admin	admin		
clients	group	clients	class	clients		
home	home	home	home	home	social and family	
dinner and crash in front of TV		dinner and relax in front of TV				

Finding a balance

So, now that we have identified ourselves as candidates for burnout, we need to learn how to integrate our busy, multi-faceted role into our lives without physically and mentally exhausting ourselves. The key is to plan ahead, monitor your fatigue and rate of recovery, and develop a simple daily recovery routine. The following simple checklist identifies daily, weekly and annual recovery strategies for busy trainers.



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Annual integrated planning (1 to 2 hours a year)

- ☑ Set goal(s) for the year
- ☑ Have a musculo-skeletal and medical assessment once a year
- ☑ Plan holidays in advance
- ☑ Identify and plan for some professional development

Weekly planning (5 to 10 minutes a week)

- ☑ At least one day away from work
- ☑ Sports massage (1 hour)
- ☑ Pre-rehabilitation training e.g. shoulder knee and core stability (2 to 3 short sessions a week of 10 to 15 minutes each)
- ☑ Some hydrotherapy – spa with plunge, or pool session
- ☑ Plan next week in advance (5 to 10 minutes)

Daily planning

- ☑ Self monitoring check
- ☑ Hydration/urine checks
- ☑ Hydrate and refuel regularly throughout the day
- ☑ Dedicated time with family and partner
- ☑ Stretch and contrast showers after work and training
- ☑ Relax with book, music, TV/DVD etc. before bed

Training is an extremely physically and psychologically demanding profession. Many excellent trainers quit as a result of excessive commitments that leave them time poor and suffering burnout. To avoid the same fate, apply the same training principles to yourself that you use with your clients; it will help you to enjoy your career and last the distance. ■

Acknowledgement

Tables and content modified from:

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