How To Overcome & Recover From Compassion Fatigue

Although workers may strive to compartmentalize or “wall off” their emotions by separating their professional lives from their home lives, most find it impossible to control the overlapping influence each area has on the other.

The keys to recovery are balance and rejuvenation. Here’s what you can do to achieve this.

• Schedule a regular activity you enjoy that removes you from your daily stressors and allows you to mentally unwind.
• Find a daily outlet for your emotions, like writing down your feelings or talking to coworkers about the job-related emotions you struggle with.
• Talk to friends and family about how they can help you cope.
• Join a support group filled with people who face similar emotional challenges in their jobs.
• Exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet.
• Explore meditation, prayer, and other activities that help you relax and center yourself.
• Know when to quit. Your physical, mental, and emotional reserves aren’t unlimited. Take a mental health day or schedule a vacation when you’re feeling run down or burned out.
• Reconnect with people and activities that are meaningful to you. The things you put on the back burner are often the ones that have the most restorative effects once you turn your attention toward them again.

What Causes Compassion Fatigue

The phrase “a heavy heart” is sometimes used to describe overwhelming sadness and emotional exhaustion. Though unscientific, it’s an appropriate metaphor for what’s happening to you when suffering from compassion fatigue.

Working with those who have been gravely injured, seriously or terminally ill, or suffering from abuse—either physically or emotionally—requires a tremendous amount of empathy. This “opening of the heart” leaves you vulnerable as you absorb the emotion, pain, and trauma of the people whom you’re tasked with helping. Over time, the burden becomes overwhelming.

It’s Okay To Put Yourself First

Some people are wired in such a way that makes it difficult—either because of guilt or a sense of obligation—to put themselves first. If this sounds like you, remember this: You’re most able to make a difference for someone else when you’re healthy, energized, and emotionally balanced.