



CTRL + ALT + DELETE BURNOUT



a research report into
burnout-related hardship
among chartered accountants



1.

a note from the Chief Executive

Dr Cristian Holmes,
Chief Executive at
caba

20%

rise in chartered accountants experiencing burnout symptoms over the past 2 years

Cases of burnout have spiked across large parts of the UK workforce in recent years. So much so, that Mental Health UK is now warning that the country is on the verge of becoming a “burnt-out nation”.

As a sector, accountancy has proven to be especially vulnerable. Our latest research report shows an almost 20% increase in the number of chartered accountants reporting symptoms of burnout (e.g., exhaustion, detachment or decreased performance at work) since our last study two years ago. Almost 3 in 4 respondents (74%) said they’d experienced feelings of burnout, either sometimes, often or constantly over the past year.

Chartered accountants have always been susceptible to high rates of stress and exhaustion. Part of this is the nature of the role: long working hours, tight deadlines and competing priorities can often make for a high-pressure environment. Many chartered accountants thrive under these conditions and are extremely happy in their role. However, for some individuals, the pressure can become overwhelming, leading to prolonged periods of excessive stress. If not addressed, this then has the potential to become chronic and debilitating.

At caba, we’re committed to supporting ICAEW members and their dependents through difficult times. We have a range of confidential support available to help those struggling with signs of burnout, including mental health counselling and financial assistance for those experiencing hardship.

To help us develop and enhance our services even further, we recently spoke to over 300 UK chartered accountants from various professional bodies to find out about their experience of burnout and ask them what support they think would be most helpful. We also spoke about any existing barriers that might get in the way of someone seeking help.

Our goal is to reduce instances of burnout within the ICAEW community by encouraging anyone struggling with burnout-related symptoms to reach out – whether that’s to a loved one, a friend, a member of their community, or to us.

Because no matter how low you might be feeling, there’s always someone there to support and guide you. You’re never alone.

2. what is burnout?

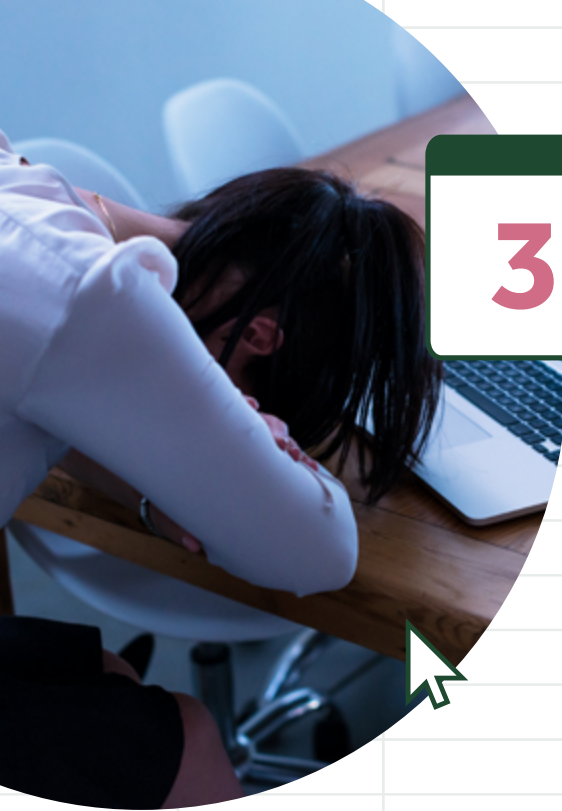
Burnout is more than feeling stressed; it's a state of chronic physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. It develops over time as overwhelming demands and pressures lead to feelings of helplessness, detachment, and cynicism.

When you have burnout, even the smallest of tasks, such as taking a shower or sending an email, can feel like you're climbing a mountain.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises burnout as an occupational phenomenon, characterised by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.





3.

what are the symptoms?

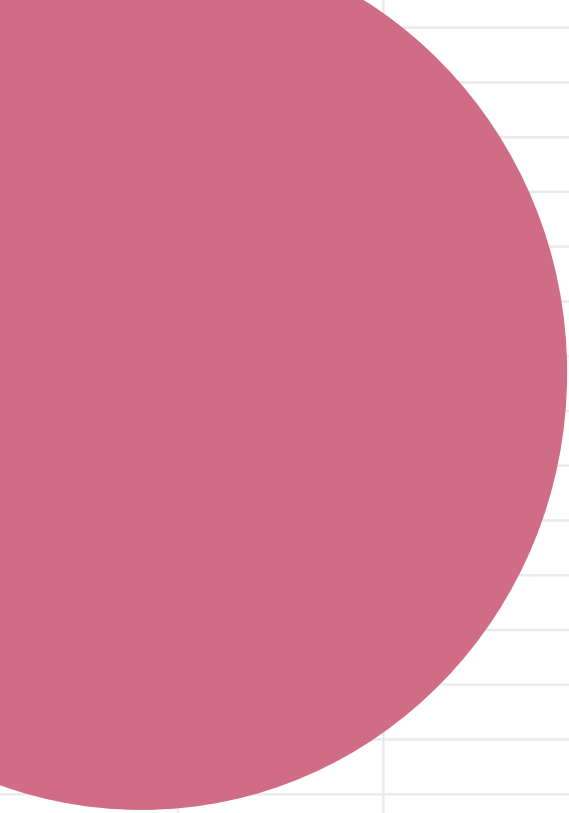
The symptoms of burnout can vary but are typically grouped into three main categories: **physical, emotional,** and **behavioural**. These symptoms often overlap and may worsen if not addressed.

physical symptoms:

- Persistent fatigue or exhaustion, even after adequate rest
- Headaches or muscle pain
- Sleep disturbances, such as insomnia or restless sleep
- Weakened immune system, leading to frequent illnesses
- Changes in appetite or weight

emotional symptoms:

- Feeling emotionally drained or overwhelmed
- Increased irritability or mood swings
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or detachment
- A sense of failure or self-doubt
- Reduced motivation or difficulty finding joy in work



behavioural symptoms:

- **Withdrawing from responsibilities or avoiding work-related tasks**
- **Procrastination or decreased productivity**
- **Increased cynicism or negativity toward your job or colleagues**
- **Substance misuse, such as alcohol or caffeine, to cope**
- **Isolating from friends, family, or co-workers**

It's important to note that **not everyone experiencing signs of burnout will meet the criteria for clinical burnout.** Seeking support for and addressing any symptoms as soon as possible is essential in preventing them from getting worse and becoming chronic.



4.

how prevalent are burnout-related symptoms in the accountancy sector?

In our research of 301 UK chartered accountants, 44% reported symptoms of burnout either constantly or often in the past year.

This increases to...

74%

reporting symptoms of burnout sometimes in the past year.

Of those reporting burnout symptoms, 63% agreed that their current work environment contributed to these feelings, with the reasons identified as:

- 46% excessive workload
- 32% monotonous or unchallenging work
- 31% lack of support

The ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance is also a contributing factor:

- 45% felt that work-life imbalance was a current cause
- 54% said burnout affected their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance

"63% of accountants agree that their current work environment contributed to their feelings of burnout. This shines a light on the need for research-backed burnout management interventions that extend beyond prevention"

Ola Opoosun,
Head of Support Services at caba



5.

experiences of burnout among chartered accountants

The experiences of burnout can vary person-to-person. They can also range in severity. Our findings show that these experiences can be categorised into four key areas: mental health, physical health, financial wellbeing and relationships.

“Feeling empowered to take early action is crucial in preventing symptoms of burnout from becoming chronic and debilitating. At caba, we have a range of confidential support services available to ICAEW members and their dependents, designed to support them through any difficulties they may face – be that financial, mental, physical or relational. Further details can be found on our website.”

**Dr Cristian Holmes,
Chief Executive at caba**

mental health

We asked accountants about their experiences of mental health related impacts of burnout, and they said...

- **29% experienced panic attacks always or often**
- **35% experienced anxiety always or often**
- **32% experienced depression always or often**



physical health

Our study revealed that...

- **36% of chartered accountants regularly suffer from insomnia or poor sleep**
- **41% of chartered accountants have difficulty concentrating at work or a reduced ability to perform**

financial wellbeing

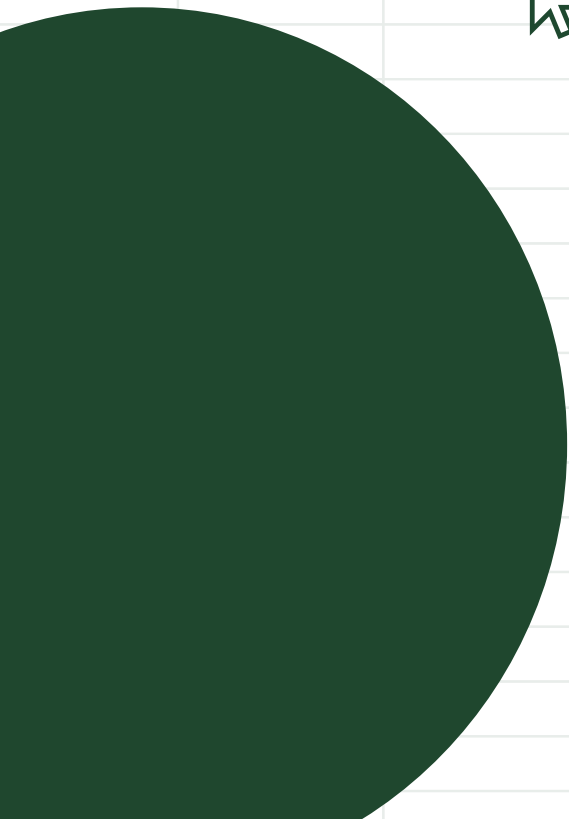
We found that...

- **32% of accountants said they had experienced financial difficulties, such as debt**
- **41% said they had considered changing careers or leaving their profession**

relationship health

Chartered accountants told us that...

- **43% have had relationship difficulties, such as a breakdown in communication or a loss of intimacy**
- **34% have felt isolated or lonely**



there's a generational divide

The data shows us that age can play a role in our susceptibility to feelings of burnout and the impact it has on us.

Across the research, accountants aged 49 years old and under report higher susceptibility to, and impact of, burnout-related symptoms.

- **39% of the under 30s**
- **40% of the 30-49s**

said they had been diagnosed or self-identified with depression.

- **55% of the under 30s**
- **17% of the 65+**

said their experience of burnout had affected their ability to work or caused them to take time off.



"Our research highlights a stark generational divide in how burnout is experienced, with younger accountants reporting a higher frequency of burnout-related symptoms. These findings emphasise the urgent need for targeted support to address the unique pressures faced by different demographics.

At caba, we're dedicated to providing proactive resources and tailored interventions to help every generation of accountants manage their wellbeing and build resilience."

**Ola Opoosun,
Head of Support Services at caba**

6.

what do you do if you're already experiencing symptoms of burnout?

When it comes to feelings of burnout, chartered accountants have found several practical strategies to be helpful. These approaches show that managing burnout isn't about doing it all; it's about finding what works best for you. Here's what's helped others:

physical activity

Physical activity is beneficial for both physical and mental health. This doesn't need to involve intense workouts - activities like taking a short walk, practising yoga, or even a brief stretch break during the workday can make a difference. Enjoyable, manageable forms of exercise tend to be the easiest to maintain long-term.

74%

of chartered accountants reported that physical activity helped them manage burnout symptoms.

taking time off

Rest and relaxation are essential components of a balanced lifestyle. Taking annual leave or setting aside even a few days for a mental reset can provide much-needed relief. Incorporating time off into regular routines allows for better recovery from workplace pressures.

42%

found that taking time off helped manage burnout-related symptoms.



reducing workload or hours

Open communication with managers or HR teams has been effective for many in addressing overwhelming workloads. By discussing challenges and collaboratively finding solutions, employees can achieve more manageable schedules.



35%

reported that a reduction in workload or hours had a positive impact on their burnout symptoms.

seeking peer support

Burnout often brings feelings of isolation, but connecting with colleagues or trusted peers can help mitigate this. Sharing experiences and gaining support from others can foster a sense of belonging and understanding, which are critical in overcoming feelings of stress and exhaustion.

25%

noted that peer support played a role in managing burnout symptoms.

speaking to a mental health professional

Although burnout itself isn't classified as a mental health condition, its prolonged effects can lead to significant emotional challenges. Accessing support from a mental health professional provides tools and strategies to cope, build resilience, and prevent more serious issues from developing.

21%

indicated that professional mental health support was valuable during their experiences with burnout

talk to caba

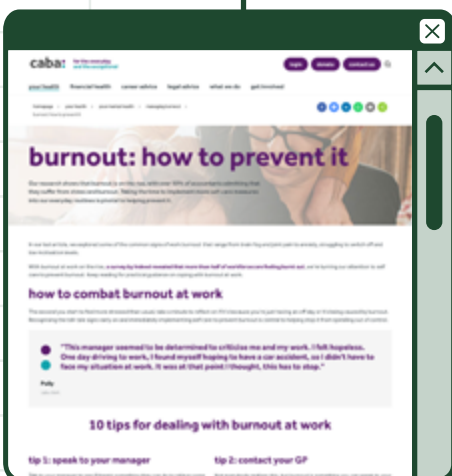


When it comes to managing burnout, it's not always easy to know where to start or which strategies will work best. This is where caba can help. As a trusted resource for ICAEW members and their dependents, we provide confidential guidance and support tailored to individual needs.

Whether it's exploring ways to reduce stress, finding balance, or accessing professional help, we can assist in identifying the most effective strategies to improve wellbeing.

preventing burnout

For those who aren't currently experiencing symptoms of burnout but who want to take proactive steps to prevent it, there are plenty of strategies to help maintain your wellbeing and resilience.



for a detailed guide on building habits that protect against feelings of burnout, visit:

CLICK

<https://www.caba.org.uk/your-health/your-mental-health/managing-burnout/burnout-how-to-prevent.html>



7. barriers to accessing support

Only 32% of accountants report that they have sought professional help to manage feelings of burnout, either currently or in the past. Of those that haven't, the barriers identified are...

- 28% are unsure whether it would help
- 19% are unsure where to get the help from
- 19% don't feel they have the time
- 17% don't want to pay to get the treatment

Stigma still plays a role, with 17% feeling embarrassed to get professional help, and with 19% feeling able to deny the severity of their symptoms.

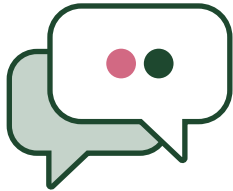


"28% of accountants are unsure whether professional support will help to manage their burnout, and 19% are unsure where to get help from. With this report we aim to not only reduce the stigma and build confidence in the support available, but to be a guiding light towards support mechanisms for burnout management."

**Ola Opoosun,
Head of Support Services at caba**

8.

how caba
can help



**“almost 2 in 5
accountants**

still feel that their workplace does not provide sufficient resources to help manage burnout. At caba, we exist to ensure everyone in the ICAEW community has the right level of support or advice so that they can manage whatever's in front of them and can thrive.”

**Dr Cristian Holmes,
Chief Executive at caba**

With the right support measures in place, individuals can take the necessary steps to tackle feelings of burnout before they become chronic, at which stage further intervention from healthcare professionals may become necessary to aid recovery.

At caba, we offer a range of services for ICAEW members and their dependents, tailored to individual needs.



a snapshot of our services includes

mental and physical health

From expert-led resources, training and guides, to accessing counselling and community support. We can support you with the mental and physical health hardships experienced due to burnout.

mental health counselling

Open

self-help guides

Open

webinars and e-learning

Open

financial wellbeing

If you're struggling to budget, or are worried about debt, our tools, tips and confidential advice services can help to ease your money worries.

financial support & grants

Open

debt advice

Open

benefits advice

Open

relationship health

Our partnership with Relate offers expert support to help you and your loved ones build a stronger, happier future together. Access professional relationship counselling online or over the phone.

