



## Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is the physical, emotional and psychological distress caused by the impact of being regularly exposed to other people's emotional pain (Macnamara, 2020). Any person can be affected and those who care for others in remote communities with limited support services are more at risk. Compassion fatigue shares some features of burnout, but onset can be quicker with some different symptoms (Delligatti, 2022).

### What causes it?



**Being exposed** to other people's pain, trauma and distress can lead to chronic stress



Putting **other people first** and neglecting our own needs



**Isolation** from friends, family and limited access to services (remote communities)



**Putting pressure on ourselves** to always be available, supportive and capable of helping

Protecting our emotional health and identifying problems early is a priority. If symptoms go unrecognised or ignored, it can negatively affect relationships, health and work. Early identification is key to recovery and helps prevent recurrence.



**"My empathy glass is full"**

**Empathy is our ability to understand and share another person's feelings**



## Compassion Fatigue

Symptoms can vary as we are all unique individuals.

1. Early signs of Compassion Fatigue	2. Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling helpless and powerless to help others</li> <li>Reduced empathy and sensitivity</li> <li>Detached, numb and emotionally disconnected</li> </ul>	<p>All of column 1, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced interest in activities or hobbies</li> <li>Increased anxiety, sadness, anger and irritability</li> <li>Struggling to concentrate and make decisions</li> <li>Sleeping problems such as waking through the night, waking up early, finding it hard to go to sleep, nightmares</li> <li>Headaches, nausea, upset stomach and dizziness</li> <li>Increased conflict in personal relationships</li> <li>Reduced self-care</li> <li>Withdrawal from friends/family</li> <li>Self-medicating with alcohol and/or other drugs</li> </ul>
<p><b>If you are experiencing symptoms from column 2 for more than two weeks, it is important to seek professional help</b></p>	

## Self-help

You can still care for others and protect yourself. Early signs of compassion fatigue can be helped.

<b>Time for self</b>	Take a couple of hours out per week doing something you enjoy, make a self-care plan and stick to it! Finding the time may reduce the risk of developing compassion fatigue.
<b>Support</b>	Talk to trusted friend or family member can bring comfort and clarity to how you feel.
<b>Set boundaries</b>	Recognise your emotional and physical limits. You can't be available all the time, be honest and let the person you are supporting know this. Caring for self is essential to reduce the risk of compassion fatigue.
<b>Offer other supports</b>	Suggest the person talks with their GP, a professional counsellor or other available services. Example: "I'm here for you but I don't have the counselling skills to support you through this". Know your limitations and communicate that to the person.
<b>Self-compassion</b>	Having the same compassion for ourselves as we do for others is important. Be kind to yourself when you make mistakes, forgive yourself if you don't have time/energy.
<b>Be well</b>	Exercise regularly, eat healthily, make sure you get enough sleep and <b>drink alcohol in moderation.</b>

## Professional help

Compassion fatigue is recoverable and putting in steps to prevent it happening again is essential to our overall health. If you think you may be experiencing Compassion Fatigue, there is help available.

- Speak to a GP, Psychologist or other available counsellor
- Access online counselling
- Learn about Compassion Fatigue

### References

Delligatti. A. M. (2022). *Compassion fatigue is not limited to healthcare workers*. <https://amdphd.com/resource-center/compassion-fatigue-is-not-limited-to-healthcare-workers>

Macnamara. N. (2020). *Understanding vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue*. Australian Childhood Foundation. CETC. <https://www.cetc.org.au/understanding-vicarious-trauma-and-compassion-fatigue/#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20set%20of,physical%20ailments%2C%20and%20sleep%20disturbances.>

Smith. D. D. (2022). *Compassion fatigue is real and it may be weighing you down*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2022/03/compassion-fatigue-is-real-and-it-may-be-weighing-you-down>