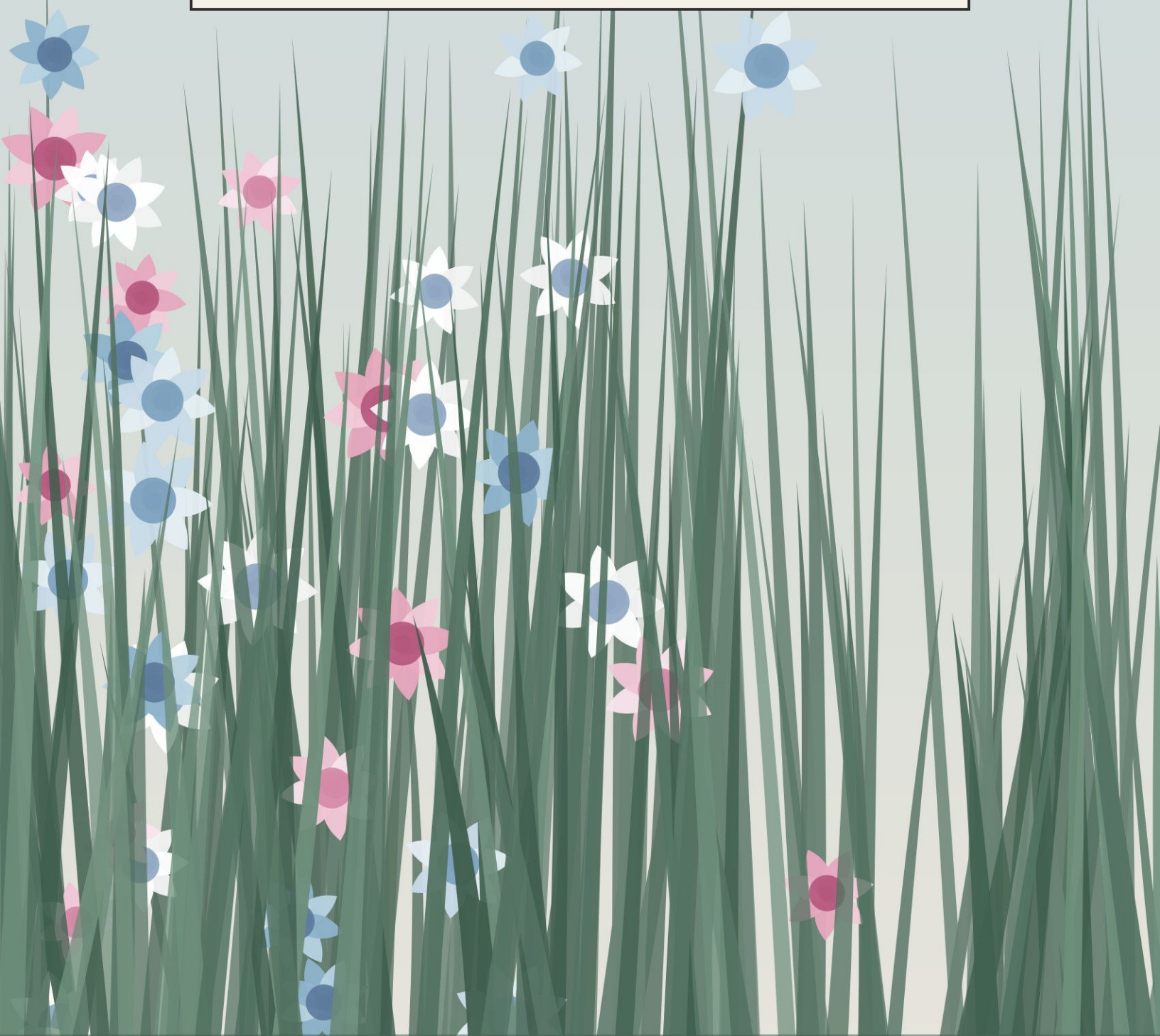


*understanding
burnout*

A Reflection Workbook

SIMPLY BEING THERAPY



BEFORE WE BEGIN

Welcome

I want to say something before we begin, because I think it matters more than anything else in this workbook: needing rest is not a personal failing, and burnout is not a character flaw. It is what happens to a nervous system that has been asked to keep going for too long, with too little recovery.

Most people who pick this up are already tired — tired of pushing through, tired of the guilt that shows up when they finally slow down, tired of hearing “just set better boundaries” as if that alone could undo months or years of overextension. If that's you, I want to offer a different starting place. Instead of asking how to power through, we're going to get curious about what your exhaustion is actually telling you, and what your body and mind need in order to genuinely recover — not just push past the wall again.

This isn't a workbook you'll finish and suddenly feel fixed. Burnout doesn't resolve because you understood it intellectually. It resolves through small, repeated acts of attention and care, the kind that add up slowly. My hope is that by the end of these pages, you'll have a clearer map of your own burnout — where it comes from, what your body does with stress, and what genuinely helps — along with a few tools you'll actually use.

Take your time. There's no version of this you can do wrong.

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SIMPLY BEING THERAPY

BEFORE WE BEGIN

How to Use This Workbook

A few notes before you start.

This workbook has three short chapters, each built around a single question: Am I burning out, or just having a hard week? What does it actually take to recover from stress? And what's really driving my exhaustion, underneath the busyness? You can move through them in order, or jump to whichever feels most relevant right now.

Every chapter follows the same shape. A Therapist's Reflection offers a small piece of what I might say to you in a session. A Research Snapshot summarizes relevant psychology in plain language, without jargon. A few short reflection prompts invite you to slow down and get specific. And Take It With You closes each chapter with one thing to carry into your week.

This isn't a test, and there's no scoring. Some prompts ask you to write; others ask you to circle or rate. Use whichever format helps you think. If a question doesn't fit your situation, skip it or adapt it.

A CAVEAT

This workbook draws on ideas from stress-recovery research and self-compassion research. It's meant to be a reflective, educational resource — not a substitute for therapy, and not a diagnostic or clinical tool. If working through it brings up more than you expected, that's worth mentioning to a therapist, not something to push through alone.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding Burnout

Burnout doesn't usually arrive all at once. It tends to build in layers — a stretch of long hours here, a season of caregiving there, months of putting everyone else's needs ahead of your own — until one day you notice you feel different. Flatter. More brittle. Less like yourself. Understanding what's happening underneath is often the first real step toward recovering from it.

Researchers who study burnout generally describe three things happening together: emotional exhaustion, a sense of detachment or cynicism, and a creeping doubt about your own effectiveness. Exhaustion is the piece most people notice first — the bone-deep tiredness that doesn't lift with a good night's sleep. Detachment is quieter: work, relationships, or things you used to care about start to feel far away, like you're going through the motions. The doubt sneaks in last, chipping away at your confidence in things you've always been capable of. None of these show up because you're weak. They show up because a system under sustained strain starts protecting itself by shutting things down.

One of the more useful distinctions in stress research is the difference between a stressor and the stress response. The stressor is the actual thing causing you trouble — a deadline, a difficult relationship, an overloaded schedule. The stress response is what that triggers in your body: a racing heart, tense shoulders, shallow breath, a mind that won't stop cataloging everything undone. Here's the part that surprises people: solving the stressor doesn't automatically turn off the stress response. You can send the email, finish the project, or end the conflict, and still feel keyed up hours later, because your body hasn't gotten the signal that it's safe to stand down. Recovering from stress means completing that cycle on purpose — through movement, breath, rest, connection, or whatever helps your body register that the danger has passed — not just resolving the problem on paper.

The other piece worth naming is what actually drains people. It's rarely just the number of hours worked. It's often the invisible labor underneath: the mental load of tracking everyone else's needs, the emotional effort of managing how you come across, the pressure of trying to get everything right, the sheer number of small decisions you make every day, and the self-criticism that shows up when you fall short of your own impossible standards. This kind of load is harder to see and even harder to hand off, which is part of why it's so exhausting — and part of why “just work less” rarely solves the whole problem.

This is also where self-compassion enters the picture — not as a soft add-on, but as a genuine tool for recovery. The way you talk to yourself when you're struggling has a real, measurable effect on your stress levels. A harsh inner voice keeps your body in a state of threat even after the external stressor has passed; a kinder one helps it settle. Treating

yourself with the same warmth you'd offer a friend who was struggling isn't indulgent — it's one of the more reliable ways to interrupt the burnout cycle.

The three chapters ahead build on these ideas. The first will help you get honest about where you actually stand — burned out, or just in a hard stretch — without pathologizing either one. The second focuses on completing the stress cycle: recognizing that solving a problem and calming your nervous system are two different jobs, and that only one of them happens automatically. The third looks underneath the obvious causes of exhaustion, at the invisible labor and self-imposed pressure that often do more damage than the visible workload.

None of this is about becoming more productive or resilient in a way that lets you sustain an unsustainable pace. It's about understanding your own patterns clearly enough to make different choices — and treating yourself with enough care along the way that those choices are possible to make.

Am I Burning Out...or Just Having a Hard Week?

A short check-in to help you tell the difference — and respond with care either way.

Hard weeks happen. Deadlines pile up, someone gets sick, sleep gets thin — and then things settle again. Burnout is different. It tends to build slowly, linger even after a break, and touch how you feel about the people and work you usually care about. This chapter isn't a diagnosis — it's a way to get honest, gentle information about where you actually stand right now.

Therapist's Reflection

“Clients often tell me they feel guilty even asking this question — as if naming exhaustion is complaining. It isn't. Noticing early is one of the most self-respecting things you can do.”

Research Snapshot

Burnout researchers describe three hallmark signs: emotional exhaustion (feeling drained before the day even starts), detachment or cynicism (going through the motions, feeling numb to things that used to matter), and a sense of reduced effectiveness (doubting your own competence). A hard week can bring one of these briefly. Burnout tends to bring several, and they don't fully lift with a weekend off.

Burnout Symptom Checklist

Check anything that's been true for you over the past two weeks.

- Feeling tired even after resting or sleeping
- Dreading things you used to enjoy or feel neutral about
- Feeling cynical, numb, or detached from work, family, or friends
- Snapping more easily, or feeling less patient than usual
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Doubting your ability to do things you normally handle well
- Physical symptoms — headaches, tight jaw, stomach issues, getting sick more often
- Withdrawing from people or canceling plans to be alone
- A sense that no amount of rest actually helps

Where Is the Drain Coming From?

Rate how drained each area currently leaves you.

Area	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caregiving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental load	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-criticism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

0 = none · 10 = completely drained

If your exhaustion could speak, what would it want you to know?

One thing I can do this week to support myself is...

TAKE IT WITH YOU

Whichever answer you landed on today, it's information — not a verdict. If several boxes are checked or your drain ratings run high, that's worth taking seriously: talk to a therapist, a doctor, or someone you trust. If it's mostly a hard week, be as kind to yourself getting through it as you would be to a friend.

Completing the Stress Cycle

Solving the problem and calming the body aren't always the same task.

You can finish the to-do list, send the email, resolve the conflict — and still feel wired, braced, or heavy hours later. That's because stress is a physical cycle in the body, not just a mental problem to solve. Thinking your way out of a situation doesn't always tell your nervous system the danger has passed. This chapter is about giving your body that signal on purpose.

Therapist's Reflection

“A client once told me, ‘I fixed the problem, so why do I still feel awful?’ The problem and the feeling are two different things. You can handle one without ever addressing the other — which is exactly why the stress can quietly stack up.”

Research Snapshot

Stress researchers make a useful distinction between the stressor (the event itself) and the stress response (what it does in your body). Removing the stressor doesn't automatically discharge the stress response. Movement, breath, affection, laughter, creative expression, and crying are among the ways the body signals to itself that it's safe again — completing the cycle rather than just enduring it.

Name the Stressor

Describe one stressful event from the past few days.

What thoughts showed up when it happened?

Where Did It Land in Your Body?

Check anything you noticed during or after the stressful moment.

- Tight chest or shallow breathing
- Clenched jaw or shoulders up near your ears
- Knot or flutter in your stomach
- Headache or tension somewhere specific
- Fatigue or heaviness
- Restlessness — wanting to move, pace, or fidget
- Racing heart
- Other

Choose One Way to Complete the Cycle

Pick one, and actually do it before you move on to the next thing.

- Movement — a brisk walk, stretching, shaking out your hands and arms
- Slow, deliberate breathing (longer exhale than inhale) for one minute
- Physical affection — a hug, a hand on your own chest, petting an animal
- Laughter, or a few minutes with something that reliably makes you laugh
- Crying, if it's there and wants to come
- Creative expression — drawing, singing, playing an instrument, journaling by hand
- Other

Five-Minute Check-In

After your chosen activity, notice what shifted.

Emotions:

Body:

Mind:

What helped, even a little?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

The goal isn't to eliminate stress — it's to keep it moving through you instead of settling in. A daily minute of intentional recovery, even on ordinary days, keeps the cycle from stacking up unnoticed.

What Is Really Draining Me?

Burnout is rarely just about being busy. This chapter looks underneath.

“I’m just busy” is often the surface story. Underneath, the real drain can come from things that don’t show up on a calendar: the mental tracking of everyone else’s needs, the emotional work of managing how you come across, the pressure to get everything right, the decisions that never stop coming, or simply not having enough support around you. This chapter helps you find the hidden contributors, not just the visible ones.

Therapist's Reflection

“So many people I work with can list their tasks but can't name what's actually costing them. The task list is rarely the real story — the invisible labor underneath it usually is.”

Research Snapshot

Chronic burnout is often driven less by hours worked and more by invisible labor — emotional labor, caregiving, perfectionism, decision fatigue, self-criticism, and a lack of support. These forms of load are harder to see, harder to delegate, and easy to underestimate, which is part of why they're so exhausting.

Energy Inventory

For each area, rate how much it drains you and how much it gives back, 0–10.

Life Area	Drain (0–10)	Gives Back (0–10)
Work	_____	_____
Home / household	_____	_____
Parenting / caregiving	_____	_____
Relationships	_____	_____
Finances	_____	_____
Health	_____	_____
Social obligations	_____	_____
Self-expectations / inner critic	_____	_____

What surprised you?

Which area deserves your attention first?

Which area gives you energy?

One small change I could make this week...

TAKE IT WITH YOU

You don't have to fix every draining area at once. Start with the one you named first — and protect the one that gives you energy back. Both matter.

BEFORE YOU GO

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

If any of this resonated, that's worth paying attention to. Insight helps, but it only goes so far on its own — burnout tends to loosen its grip fastest with real support, not just another exercise.

If you're ready for that kind of support, Simply Being Therapy offers individual therapy for people navigating burnout, chronic stress, and the patterns that keep them stuck in it. We'd love to help you find your way back to yourself.

READY TO TALK?

Visit [simplybeingtherapy.com](https://www.simplybeingtherapy.com) to learn more or schedule a free consultation. You can also follow [@simplybeingtherapy](https://www.instagram.com/simplybeingtherapy) for more reflections and resources like this one.