

## 8 Top Tips for Coping With (or avoiding) Burn out and Depression

by Cynthia Hancox ©2020

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Since I first shared my own depression story in *Goodbye Chaos, Hello Peace!* and on my website, a number of ladies have responded by telling me that they, too, suffer from depression, and asking if I have any tips for coping with it. Here are my 8 Top Tips For Coping With Depression - these work well for burn-out or those who are just plain stressed-out too!

1. **Talk about it!** Bottling up your feelings leads to internalizing the stress, and can cause a worsening of your emotions, as well as the occurrence of a variety of physical symptoms as your body reacts to the effects of stress. On the other hand, talking about it helps you to feel better, feel less confused, less alone and gives you back a sense of perspective and some control. Talk to someone you trust who you know will listen to you. Be honest about how you feel and what is weighing you down. Don't expect this person to have all the answers to your problems - what you need is to talk it over, which will help you begin to see for yourself how to sort out what to do. You could talk to family or friends, a councillor, trusted medical professional or an internet friend. For myself, both times I suffered depression, it was when I talked about it openly, pouring out my heart to someone I trusted that the turning point came.

2. **Press in to God!** God loves you deeply, completely. He can help you find your way out of the pit of depression. However, Christian research has shown that it is very common for someone who is depressed to feel as though God is far away and they cannot reach him. A depressed person may find it hard to pray or read the Bible. I tell you this to point out that these feelings and reactions are NORMAL - it is not a spiritual fault in you, but the depression causing your mind and emotions to send you misleading signals. I urge you not to give up, but to do what you can to reach out to God anyway, no matter how you FEEL. Feelings are valid, but they do not change the TRUTH, which is that God loves you and will never leave or forsake you. Just because you cannot feel his presence at any given moment, does not mean he is not there. Read the Psalms - how often did David cry out to God asking why he was so far away? God wasn't far away - it was David's own emotional state that made it seem so. But in crying out to God with honesty, David helped himself to get back some perspective - he moves in his Psalms from crying out in despair to praising God for his faithfulness.

3. **Let go of your Perfectionism!** One dictionary definition of perfectionism is "A propensity for being displeased with anything that is not perfect or does not meet extremely high standards." The Webster's 1828 dictionary defined a perfectionist as "one pretending to perfection." A perfectionist demands unattainably high standards of themselves and everyone around them. They believe that these standards CAN be met, and are constantly frustrated because they are not. Often they expect excellence in too many things at once. They expect themselves to be the proverbial Superwoman or Superman, and beat themselves up when they fail to obtain this. A

perfectionist keeps a mask firmly in place, shifting heaven and earth to always maintain an outward appearance of excellence in everything, even when they are falling apart on the inside. A perfectionist will never let anyone see their home less than spotless, though the truth may be that it usually is a mess. Dear one, stop pretending!! It's killing you! And let go of those impossible standards - they're killing you AND your family! As a former perfectionist myself, I used to believe that if I did not always appear to be in control and on top of all areas of my life, then I would be a bad witness and no-one would be attracted to Christianity or homeschooling or having a large family. In fact, the opposite is true! If I appear perfect in everything, "mere mortals" say to themselves - "it's alright for HER, but I could never do that!" When I show myself honestly and as less than perfect, it takes a lot of pressure off me. And, others are encouraged by the fact that I am not perfect, but can be a Christian or a homeschooler or a mother of many anyway!

**4. Use someone else's plan!** In the midst of depression, one thing that discourages many women more than anything else is the fact that their home is in chaos, and they are so overwhelmed they don't know where to begin. When you are stressed-out or depressed, making decisions or figuring out a plan is often simply beyond your present capabilities. But knowing that there IS a plan in place, and all you have to do is take this or that one small step at a time, and the rest WILL be taken care of further down the track relieves a lot of pressure, and gives your mind a break! So, if you cannot formulate your own plan, use someone else's! There are several good organizing systems freely available to you via the internet - Flylady is one, the Organizer Lady is another, and of course my *Goodbye Chaos, Hello Peace!* series is designed to lead you step by step as well. The point is to give yourself a break from trying to figure it all out, and just let someone else lead you along for a while. It will be such a relief to your over-burdened heart and mind!

And this might also apply to your homeschooling too. Are you one of those amazing mothers who spends hours putting together ideas and resources for your children's daily program? Maybe this is a season to use an "open and go" program for a while, or something with which the children can be more self-directed, or whatever works to lighten your load and take some of the decision making off your plate for a while.

**5. Look after your health.** Burn out and depression can have many different root causes, and sometimes it feels like the chicken and egg scenario – which came first? Your underlying physical health can be a trigger for depression, or depression can be a trigger for physical health issues. These days I know that I have an autoimmune disorder called Hashimoto's. When I look back at that second period of severe depression, I believe both that my underlying predisposition to Hashimotos was part of what was happening there, though the minimal testing I was given at the time did not show a clinical picture yet, and also that that time of extreme stress fully triggered my autoimmune condition, which went on to manifest in increasing ways over the subsequent years until it was finally identified and managed.

How is YOUR overall health? When did you last have a physical? Do you have any known health issues you could be managing better? Are you making sure you eat properly, exercise, drink enough water? While it's true that this body is only our

temporary home, and one day we will receive a new body free from all the things we suffer now, it is currently the one we live in, and we do need to take care of it as much as possible if we want to be able to serve our Lord and our families well.

**6. Disconnect!** While the web gives us wonderful opportunities today to connect and receive support, it can also be the source of much of our stress and anxiety. The news media, social media and so on and so forth are always filled with the latest gloom and doom, riots, virus statistics, predictions of economic disaster, discussion about who's trying to manipulate us now and so on and so forth. Certainly we need to stay informed of current circumstances that directly affect us. But we don't need to be constantly bombarded! Turn off the tv. Shut down your computer and phone. Spend some time in nature – even if that's sitting on a chair looking at a tree in your garden! Get some sun on your face and arms if you can. Sing songs of praise and worship, spend time reading good books to your kids. Do normal without the nasty! Limit your exposure to all the other stuff, and you'll be better for it!

**7. Rest!** What most depressed people need more than any other thing is more sleep! Sleep deprivation can lead to depression in the first place, but even if that is not how you got into the pit, LOTS of sleep is a vital part of the healing process. You need to rest MORE than a person who is in a normal, healthy state does. During sleep, the mind is able to heal itself and restore balance. Unfortunately, the feeling of being stressed out can lead to insomnia, and become part of a vicious cycle. That is why I've listed this (almost) last, not first, even though it is the thing most needed. You see, if you follow the other tips I've given - talk about your feelings, reach out to God, let go of your perfectionism, grab hold of a plan, look after your health, and disconnect from media, you will find much relief from the racing thoughts and sense of rising panic that comes with stress and stops you from relaxing and sleeping. You will be more able to let go at night, able to tell yourself that it's ok - you aren't there yet, but you're on the right track and you WILL get there! If you find yourself still unable to sleep, then I urge you to seek medical help to break the cycle. Sleep is VITAL to coping with stress and recovering from depression. (For some people, the opposite is true, and they do nothing BUT sleep when depressed – for them balance is needed too).

**8. Seek professional help.** Medical or other professional help can be an important part of a recovery plan for depression. A person who is clinically depressed has a chemical imbalance in the brain that needs to be addressed, and medication may be needed to do so. That medication can bridge the gap and help you to be able to sleep, think and function while you work to address the things in your life that need changing. Medication alone is not the whole answer, but you should never feel ashamed to seek professional help! Far better to get the help you need than to struggle on alone with unnecessary difficulty.

Sometimes we can overcome depression or burn out by making lifestyle changes such as the other things mentioned above, but in some cases that is not enough and medical or other professional support is needed. So do seek advice from professionals if you need it.

For me, I needed some help getting some sleep. Years later I found that using St John's wort and a mild herbal sleeping tablet very helpful in ensuring I don't sink back into insomnia and depression. Everyone is different, and what works for one will be different to another. So, seek advice from trained professionals to find what works for you.

**Final note:**

My friend, you are not alone! Many people struggle just like you. I pray that the ideas offered here will help and encourage you, and that you will set out on the road to recovery, or of making adjustments so that you avoid falling into that pit in the first place.

With love

*Cynthia*