



# April 2022: Compassion Fatigue

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***“Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.  
Without them humanity cannot survive.” – Dalai Lama***

Welcome to the **April 2022 edition of TotalWellbeing**, your guide to the **8 dimensions of wellbeing**. This month looks at compassion and what happens when stress and burnout take their toll on your ability to care.

Being compassionate and empathetic takes a lot of work and can be very tough on our mental health. While helping and caring for others, it's very important to pay attention to your own wellbeing along the way. Stress and burnout along with vicarious trauma can take hits at us without us even knowing, and before long, we are the ones in need of help. We see this a lot in people who are in caregiving positions, but that doesn't mean that compassion fatigue can't happen to anyone. To help with this, check out the compassion fatigue and self-care tips below.

Please remember that your EAP is here for you if you need to address compassion fatigue, stress, burnout, or just want to talk to someone. You have access to free and confidential counseling, wellness coaching, trainings, unlimited work/life referrals to save you time, and more. Plus, an online resource library full of proactive self-help tools! Visit [PersonalAdvantage](#) for helpful articles, personal and professional development tools, and more!

To your total wellbeing,

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The MINES Team

## ***Combating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care and Wellness***

As a young psychologist and first responder, Dr. Charles Figley worked with wounded warriors after the Vietnam War. He then realized he was taking on the soldiers' traumatic experiences as though they were his own. In 1995, he coined the phrase compassion fatigue. Figley, a professor and founder of the Traumatology Institute at Tulane University, describes it as: "an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper."

Compassion fatigue can occur to anyone who has a career or life focused on helping and healing others, particularly those in distress. It can be seen in those working as psychologists, social workers, nurses, physicians, first responders, volunteers, animal welfare workers, or any caregiving capacity when one focuses much of their energy outward. As a result, their own self-care may suffer.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

It is important to be aware of the signs and symptoms in order to recognize these in yourself or someone else. They can include:

- Feeling emotionally and physically exhausted
- Isolating from others
- Physical problems due to stress, overdoing it, or lack of self-care
- Outward focus rather than putting oneself first
- Substance abuse struggles
- Feelings of depression or apathy
- Flashbacks, recurring nightmares, or intrusive thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating and loss of productivity
- Loss of hope and feeling like one's contributions don't matter
- Causes of Compassion Fatigue

Patricia Smith, founder of the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project, describes how some individuals are more prone to compassion fatigue than others due to patterns that start in early childhood. Some people might learn at a young age to be a caregiver and never learn the importance of taking care of themselves. This personality trait might attract the individual to a helping career. These types of people are constantly giving to others until they have nothing left, and their tank is on empty. Other factors that could contribute to a pattern of putting others first include lack of personal boundaries, unresolved trauma, and

feeling responsible to constantly help others.

### Caregivers Need Self-Care Too

Caregivers need to be in a state of wellness to succeed at caregiving and avoid compassion fatigue. Psychologist Amy Williams, PhD, believes there are five crucial aspects of self-care, including getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, exercising, having relaxation time, and having social support.

Caregivers can improve their quality of life and increase their levels of happiness by directing their attention inward and taking more time to care for themselves. Often, we might feel like there aren't enough hours in the day to fit in all we need to do. However, self-care is an essential ingredient to a healthy life. Until we properly take care of ourselves, we cannot be an effective caregiver for others.

Here are some tips for dealing with compassion fatigue:

- Slow down and make self-care a priority
- Try to strike more of a balance between caring for yourself and others
- Create a clear separation between your personal and professional life
- Don't be afraid to ask for help—don't try to hold the weight of the world on your shoulders
- Connect with colleagues who can relate to your experience
- Practice mindfulness by being completely present in whatever you are doing in each moment

Be grateful for yourself and what you contribute to the world.

Remember, if you or a household member are struggling with compassion fatigue, stress, or burnout, your employee assistance program is here for you. Resources include free and confidential counseling, wellness coaching, trainings, personal development tools, and more. **If you need additional information or to access services, please call MINES and Associates at 1-800-873-7138 today.** Also, [PersonalAdvantage](#) has a ton of great resources and FREE [webinars](#).

### *Self-Care Tips*

Here are some self-care tips to help increase your own health and wellness, which is essential to effectively helping others and avoiding compassion fatigue:

- **Create a ritual transition.** Find something you can do each day when you get home from work to help transition from

your professional to personal life. It could be as simple as taking five minutes to breathe and meditate, changing out of your work clothes, or going for a walk.

- **Be present by practicing mindfulness.** Fully immerse yourself in your job duties while you are at work or in helping mode. Avoid letting your thoughts get in a negative tailspin, which can make the situation feel worse than it is. Try to also be fully present during downtime or when you are off the clock. If thoughts of work creep into your head, redirect yourself to the present moment.
- **Examine work-life balance.** Consider your current workload—do you have enough downtime in your schedule? Could you take a day off? Do you need more rest? Brainstorm what you could do to improve the balance in your life. For example, maybe you could schedule more fun activities on your days off, so you'll have more to look forward to.
- **Take a holistic approach to self-care.** Psychologist Amy Williams, PhD, believes there are five crucial aspects of self-care, including getting enough sleep, eating healthy foods, exercising, having relaxation time, and having social support. Try incorporating all these elements into your self-care routine and think about what you could improve on. If you have been eating a lot of snack foods or processed meals, try incorporating more whole foods into your diet. Try to make physical activity part of your daily routine by going for a walk after dinner or stopping at the gym on the way home from work.
- **Get adequate sleep.** Sleep is an important factor that affects your physical and mental health, as well as work performance. Sleep expert Dr. Matthew Walker said, "Sleep is the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health each day." You can't function at your best without enough sleep. Try to avoid looking at screens before bed, which can affect your circadian rhythm and increase stress levels.
- **Maintain social connections.** It's important to feel connected to others, so make sure to make time to stay in touch with friends and family members. Our relationships with others can help us feel grounded and are important to our overall wellbeing. You could also connect with colleagues who may be going through a similar experience as you. There may be support groups for you to participate in either in person or online.

***If you or a member of your household needs assistance or guidance on any of these wellbeing topics, please call MINES & Associates, your EAP, today for free, confidential, 24/7 assistance at 800.873.7138.***

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