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Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I’m Amy Morin, editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I’m also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You’re listening to The Friday Fix! Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Now let’s dive into today’s episode!

Today I’m talking about emotional exhaustion. It’s similar to crisis fatigue—which is what I talked about last time.

But, I’m hearing from so many people right now who are feeling emotionally exhausted. And of course, you can see what I’m struggling with in life based on the topics I choose to talk about and write about.

In fact, that’s true of any podcaster or author. We usually write or speak about what hurts.

So that’s today’s topic—emotional exhaustion.
I was curious just how many of you are feeling emotionally exhausted right about now. So I ran an unofficial poll on my Instagram story. Eighty-three percent of you said you feel emotionally exhausted right now.

So I’m glad we’re talking about this because I suspect most of you who are feeling this way haven’t talked about it to anyone else.

So today we’re talking about why we’re so exhausted and what we can do about it. But first, let’s talk about what it really means to be emotionally exhausted.

Last week when I talked about crisis fatigue, I discussed how the crisis of the pandemic or a personal crisis that lingers for weeks or months can lead to fatigue.

But you don’t necessarily have to be dealing with a crisis to get worn out. You might get emotionally exhausted because there are just too many demands placed on you.

Here’s an example. Maybe you have a lot of work to do at your job every day. But there are some additional things going on in the office that require your attention aside from just your daily tasks—maybe issues with colleagues. And that interferes with your productivity and drains a lot of your energy. Then, maybe at home, you take care of someone—like your kids or an elderly parent. And perhaps you have some personal issues you’re working through too—like you’re trying to manage a health issue or tackling a serious financial problem. Maybe on top of all that you’re also dealing with a contentious divorce and some ongoing custody issues.

That may not sound exactly like your life. But, I bet you could easily replace some of those struggles with struggles of your own.

We all have struggles in life. And sometimes, we have one giant struggle that takes a lot of our time and mental energy—like a life or death health issue. At other times, we have a whole pile of struggles that require an ongoing juggling act to decide what issue needs to be prioritized at this moment.

Those are the kinds of things that lead to emotional exhaustion.
So while yes we are dealing with national and international crises at the moment, it’s quite possible that those things aren’t demanding all your attention.

Instead, you might just be so emotionally exhausted from your everyday life that you just don’t have anything left to give.

So how do you know when you’re emotionally exhausted? Here’s the telltale sign: you go from intense emotions to feeling numb.

Let’s say you’re worried about a loved one who has had some unexplained health issues lately and you’re concerned they may have something seriously wrong. You schedule multiple doctors appointments hoping to get some answers but each doctor does some tests and sends you away without any real information. For the first few appointments, you’ll probably experience intense anxiety as you’re anticipating some answers on what’s wrong with your loved one and what kind of treatment they might need. After several weeks of appointments, seeing multiple doctors, and getting zero answers, you might start to feel numb.

Your intense anxiety might subside–and you might just feel really tired and somewhat apathetic.

At first, that feels good. The relief from anxiety can feel amazing. But, pretty quickly you’re going to realize you don’t just numb the uncomfortable emotions. When you’re emotionally exhausted, you’ll be numb to everything. You won’t experience the same happiness and excitement as you used to.

And you might find that you just feel like you’re going through the motions. Even when you’re doing things that are supposed to be fun, you might feel a bit like a zombie who is there physically but not mentally.

And you might spend your spare time doing more mind numbing things, like scrolling through your phone or staring at the TV.

If any of that rings true, trust that you’re not alone. Everyone feels emotionally exhausted sometimes.
And when you’re exhausted, the typical “take care of yourself” advice doesn’t work, right? Like a 30 minute bubble bath doesn’t erase three months of sheer exhaustion.

Of course you should take care of yourself. Eat healthy, sleep if you can, get some exercise, and do whatever it is you do to take care of yourself.

All of those things will help but there’s also a chance you’re already doing your best to manage those things and you’re still exhausted. And hearing you should just take better care of yourself only reinforces that there’s something wrong with you and will exhaust you even more.

So I’m going to share something else that can help. But before I do, I’m going to share what not to do.

Don’t avoid tackling problems. That makes emotional exhaustion worse.

But it’s hard. When you’re exhausted, your brain will convince you that you can’t possibly tackle that pile of unpaid bills. Or it will try to tell you that making a phone call is too much work. Or that you shouldn’t bother asking someone for help because they’ll probably say no.

Avoidance though, makes emotional exhaustion worse. Our problems don’t go away. They just keep piling up. And when you know there’s a pile of problems waiting for you, you get even more emotionally exhausted.

So what’s the solution? It’s actually to push yourself to take action. I know, when you’re tired it’s not what you want to hear.

But it’s really the key to breaking out of the pattern that causes us to feel exhausted.

When you find yourself thinking you can’t do it, there’s no sense in trying, or it’s not going to work, take a deep breath and remind yourself you’ve done tough things before and you can do this too.
Then go do something. Whether you make a call you’ve been putting off or you tackle a pile of dishes in the sink. Getting something done will reduce your exhaustion.

Now, I know there are some situations where there’s not a specific problem to tackle. Maybe you’re exhausted because of something going on in the news or because of someone else’s behavior.

In those cases, there’s still something you can do. Do one thing that makes the world a little bit better.

It doesn’t have to be big. It doesn’t have to cost any money. And it doesn’t have to take much time.

But you can always show gratitude and appreciation toward someone else. Send a friend a long text message about why you appreciate them. Reach out to a stranger that you follow on social media to tell them how much you appreciate their content. Give your neighbor some flowers. Tell someone they’re doing a good job. It can help you feel a lot better.

It doesn’t have to be anything big. And you never know what a kind gesture might turn into.

A few days ago I was on a plane and the man next to me had asked the flight attendant for water. The flight attendant forgot and never brought him any. I realized I had an unopened water bottle in my bag so I gave it to him. For the rest of the flight we had this amazing conversation—and it all started with me handing him a water bottle. The conversation was an added benefit. But being able to do that little gesture—giving someone water—felt really good.

A little act of kindness can remind you that no matter how bad things are, there is always something you can control. You can contribute a little kindness to the world, no matter how exhausted you feel.

And even though it may seem counterintuitive to contribute something when you feel like you have nothing to give, it works.
Here’s why: we feel our best in life when we have control over something. Emotional exhaustion often comes about because we feel like we have no control over a situation. Taking back control, even if it’s over something small, reminds us that there are things we can control even in the harshest of circumstances.

So if you’re feeling emotionally exhausted right now, identify one step you can take today to either address a specific problem or to make the world a little bit better. Then, go do it. And report back to me what you’re doing.

Let me know on Instagram what you’re doing to manage your emotional exhaustion and we can share ideas with each other. You never know—someone else might find one of your strategies to be helpful too so we might as well share how we’re doing this.

Look me up on Instagram where you can find me as AmyMorinAuthor. I’ll post something in my stories so we can all share our ideas. And if you don’t see it there, send me a DM. Tell me what are you doing to manage your emotional exhaustion? I’d love to know.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger!

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (who makes it a habit to do kind things for other people), Nick Valentin.