

What Would Mac Do?

Vol. 3

Dear Mac, I'm a surgeon in your Department who is experiencing serious burnout. I'm fine in the operating room, when patient health is on the line, but it's becoming increasingly difficult for me to find the motivation to work on my education and research initiatives. How do you recommend I rejuvenate myself without drastically altering my workload?

The term “burnout” has become a buzzword in today’s lexicon. People from all walks of life are experiencing mental and physical fatigue, in large part because of their jobs. In the digital age that we find ourselves in, people are more plugged in than ever before. Emails, phone calls, and text messages bombard us at all hours of the day, and a lot of people — especially doctors and surgeons — feel a moral obligation to acknowledge them all promptly. But technology is a can of worms unlikely to ever be closed, so instead of containing it, you need to find ways to embrace it. Learning strategies for productivity, time-management, and prioritization will go a long way in giving you some much-needed mental reprieve.

There is virtually an endless amount of resources for managing burnout, but I’ve handpicked a few for you — the first of which is a course series hosted through the [McMaster University Centre for Continuing Education \(CCE\)](#).

The Productivity Essentials program focuses on enabling your inner-organization skills. It will teach you the secrets of effectively managing your time, setting your priorities, and optimizing your interactions with co-workers, patients, and managers. Courses in the [Productivity Essentials](#) Program range from “[Creating Your Work-Life Balance](#)” and “[Maximizing Personal Productivity](#)”

to “[Project Management](#)” and “[Emotional Intelligence at Work](#).” The courses average out to be about a day each in length, and participants who successfully complete five days of training within the Productivity Essentials Program will be awarded a Certificate from McMaster University. This is not only great for your mental health, but for your CV, too.

McMaster also offers a host of burnout-preventing perks through its [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#). The program offers coaching and counselling on things ranging from relationships and finances to childcare and workplace issues.

Another handy resource for managing the symptoms of burnout (or avoiding them altogether) — and a resource specific to surgeons — is an article published by The American College of Surgeons around this time last year. “Burnout In Surgery,” as it’s titled, sites data that shows 40 per cent of surgeons feel burnt-out at any given time. We published this article on the Department of Surgery’s website and strongly encourage you to read it. It contains encouraging information and several helpful links, including one that will direct you to a free, confidential, and personalized well-being measuring tool that will help you better understand your current mental state. Read the article at [Surgery.McMaster.ca/Burnout](#).

Finally, there are several lifestyle changes or decisions you can make that will ultimately stave off burnout. The obvious way to quickly recharge the batteries is to get away from your stressors — to take a vacation! But since not everybody can just up and leave, you might have to make more subtle moves that will have a longer lasting impact on you. Diet and nutrition is a great place to start, and countless studies show that physical exercise can reverse the effects of burnout. It should go without saying, but getting the recommended eight to nine hours of sleep will also go a long way in how energized you feel at work. Last but not least, cut back on how often you take work



Meet Mac.

Mac is a new Department recruit who’s here to help you with the many hard-to-answer questions that come with being a surgeon. From operating room specifics to admin duties and management, there’s no topic too tricky for our in-house surgical expert. The next time you’re feeling stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or generally confused, ask yourself, “*What Would Mac Do?*”

home with you. Enjoy your family time and your alone time to the fullest so that your mind can establish a clear divide between work and play. Dedicating time to your favourite people or your favourite hobbies will allow you to wake up for work the next morning with a refreshed and enthusiastic mindset.

One final suggestion: talk to your colleagues. It’s likely they’ve experienced burnout at some point in their careers, too, so use them as a sounding board for your dilemma. The Department Chair and your respective Division Head are here to help, so reach out!

Anyway, I know academic surgeons are under a lot of pressure. But identifying your burnout symptoms is the first step to reversing them — and you’ve already done that! By getting away from your stressors, learning how to manage them, or making lifestyle changes that will reduce their impact on you, you’ll allow yourself to feel rejuvenated at work, which is great news for you, for our department, and for the patients you work with everyday.

Want your questions answered? Email your queries to cturner@mcmaster.ca.