

## Self-Care Tips for Operational Forecasters

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Published September 2024 (issue 10), in the National Weather Association monthly newsletter

If you experience heightened stress and anxiety when working operations, you are not alone! Many forecasters experience these as well as compassion fatigue, burnout, and [secondary traumatization](#).

**Workplace Burnout:** The American Psychological Association (APA) [defines](#) 3 facets to workforce burnout: Feelings of energy depletion or emotional exhaustion; increased mental distance from or negative/cynical feelings towards one's work; and a reduced sense of on-job efficacy. The [2022 NOAA Workforce Burnout Survey](#) assessed the extent and causes of burnout within our workforce. Over 80% of employees experienced some form of burnout within the previous 12 months. While exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiences were long-standing and often previously entrenched.

**Compassion Fatigue** is elevated emotional, physical, and/or spiritual distress caused by having knowledge about, witnessing, or otherwise being a part of others' suffering. Compassion fatigue affects meteorologists much the same as it affects healthcare and emergency responders—whether due to forecasting an event, being the warning operator, or conducting damage surveys after an event. It manifests through sleep problems; increased irritation, anger, depression, cynicism, physical and mental fatigue; reduced cognitive ability and on-job morale; and/or feeling that one is not helping enough. [Blaming oneself](#) for not being a “better” forecaster or warning operator harms well-being and morale while eroding workplace effectiveness.

### So, What Can We Do?

- **Cultivate accurate awareness:** Psychologist [Tara Brach](#) introduced the R.A.I.N. method to mindful self-awareness, which can be used in our day-to-day lives: **R**ecognize what's going on; **A**llow the experience to be just as it is; **I**nvestigate with interest and care; and **N**urture with self-compassion. This is one process for stressor management and investigating ways to improve self-care (Bolton [2021a](#), [2021b](#)).
- **Care about yourself like you would a good friend:** Have compassion for yourself! Give yourself a break and listen to your body. Eat healthy, balanced meals. To manage shift-limited schedules, make meals, like hearty soups or

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casseroles, ahead of time for freezing and reheating when you can't get something fresh.

- **Move your body** to eliminate excess energy, process stress hormones that are triggered during weather events, and encourage sleep. Finding time and juggling shift work can be challenging, especially if you have family. Try to take advantage of the “down” moments at work; for instance you might go for a quick walk or jog to “reset.” *Restorative breaks*, recently introduced to the NWS, can be used for up to an hour's administrative leave during your shift to enable exercise, meditation, or rest.
- **Other [suggestions](#)** from the NOAA Workforce Burnout Survey: Don't take on more work than you can handle. Don't read or answer emails on weekends or holidays; limit time in meetings; prioritize work; and brainstorm solutions to causes of frustration which may lead to burnout with your colleagues.