**Health and Wellbeing for Business Owners and Advisors**

Your mental health can be affected by many factors, and this, in turn, can affect your work. Mental wellbeing impacts your enthusiasm and energy for work, efficiency and effectiveness, and how you communicate with staff and clients.

Burnout can occur from obvious stresses, such as the extra workload during the COVID-19 pandemic, or less obvious factors, such as a gradual accumulation of stress and fatigue. Pressure can be from within the business environment or external – but the effects on your work may be the same.

Sometimes you will feel the impact of stress long after the original source of stress has finished – this was experienced by many in the accounting industry who supported clients during the worst of the pandemic and then suffered exhaustion and burnout once the worst of the pandemic was over.

Investing in your own mental health is essential to resilience and long-term thriving in your business. Don’t be caught out by thinking that your work is immune to your personal stresses.

Sometimes when facing burnout, the fatigue itself becomes a more significant stress than whatever events, pressures or situations gave rise to it in the first place. It's not uncommon that the initial stress has passed, yet you continue to feel stressed, knowing that it mightn't be logical. Has the stress of being stressed and tired become the main problem? This is when it’s good to talk it out and let off steam. Life hasn’t been easy in recent years, especially in the accounting industry.

When we are used to supporting business owners as one of our primary functions, it can be hard to admit that we need support for ourselves.

Many surveys have been conducted in the last two years, and the recurring theme is that business owners (including accounting professionals) have experienced significant levels of stress, anxiety and depression. In addition, they feel increased responsibility for staff wellbeing and know they 'should' do more for their own mental and emotional health but, for many and varied reasons, cannot look after themselves adequately.

**Tips for Addressing Burnout**

* Consider delegating some tasks (personal or professional) either temporarily or permanently to reduce pressure.
* Is there something in your business you could automate – or at least upgrade technology to improve systems? This could help free up mental energy for more essential tasks.
* Talk to colleagues in the Facebook group AAT Australia Bookkeepers Support Group or online discussion groups or with local business networking groups. It helps to give voice to issues you face at work with people who understand and probably face similar problems. Learn new ways of meeting challenges from each other’s experiences.
* Connecting with others also reduces the likelihood of becoming isolated and suffering in silence. You don’t have to go it alone! If you really don’t have people you want to share your stresses with, ring one of the hotlines – that’s what they’re there for.
* If you don’t have a network that you connect to, whether personal or professional, consider starting one in your area or even online.
* Schedule regular breaks for rest and/or self-care in your calendar, and don't let clients' demands override your rest time. Enforce work time boundaries.
* Book a holiday or at least block out time in your calendar for a break from work, even if you cannot go away. Don't be tempted to do any work – take a proper break. Having something on the calendar gives you something concrete to look forward to.

What’s the first smallest step you can take to look after yourself? Could you do it now or schedule a time for it? And don't forget the importance of sleep for your health and wellbeing!

**Need Support?**

Consider getting professional help. See a coach or counsellor. Or check out the Beyond Blue New Access for Small Business Owners – an excellent and free program designed to help you address stress, anxiety and depression as a business owner.

Here are some free resources you can use for support.

* [Ahead for Business](https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/) has separate pages dedicated to business owners and [small business advisors](https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/topics/category/for-people-supporting-a-business-owner).
* Business owners (including bookkeepers!) can take the [Business Stressors Screen](https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/business-stressors-screen) survey to gauge how they manage business stress and get links to other resources based on the results.
* Ahead for Business also has a self-assessment questionnaire ([Mental Health Screen](https://aheadforbusiness.org.au/mental-health-screen)) business owners you can take, giving you a snapshot of your overall mental health and levels of stress. It also recommends resources to assist you based on your results.
* Heads Up (part of Beyond Blue for workplace mental health) also has separate pages dedicated to [small business owners](https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-small-businesses) and those who [support small business](https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-small-businesses/supporting-small-businesses/)es. In addition, there is a PDF download you can use to assist you in supporting business owners.
* Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman has [My Business Health](https://www.asbfeo.gov.au/my-business-health/categories/covid-19) for those affected by COVID-19, with resources and links to other support agencies.
* [How to ask RUOK? at work](https://irp.cdn-website.com/22b3e3c9/files/uploaded/190826_WK_AskingRUOK_At_Work_Guide.pdf)
* [Business.gov.au mental health and wellbeing support for business](https://business.gov.au/risk-management/mental-health/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-for-business)
* [Supporting small business owners guide](https://www.headsup.org.au/healthy-workplaces/for-small-businesses/supporting-small-businesses/?utm_source=industry&utm_medium=print&utm_campaign=supportingsmallbusiness_sep19&utm_demo=all&utm_targeting=null&utm_format=poster&utm_creative=null&utm_objective=reach&utm_id=supportingsmallbusiness0004) from the [Heads Up](https://www.headsup.org.au/) website

Remember, you are not expected to be a counsellor for your clients. Whilst they may approach you as a trusted advisor with their stresses and concerns, do not feel you have to advise them about their worries, as you possibly have enough of your own to deal with! However, you can and should let them know of all the sources of free professional support available to them.

The AAT Facebook and discussion groups are forums you can use to talk about all topics related to being an accounting professional, including stress and challenging times.

**NewAccess for Small Business Owners**

[NewAccess for Small Business Owners](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess/newaccess-for-small-business-owners) is a mental health coaching program developed by Beyond Blue to support small business owners and sole traders who need help during tough times.

The program uses Low-intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy over six sessions with a coach who has a small business background. The coach provides practical skills and invaluable tools for managing stress as a small business owner.

The [NewAccess](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess/about-newaccess) program has been running successfully for years, and Beyond Blue have now tailored the program specifically for people running a business. The program is available nationally by phone or video.

Learn more about the program [here](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/newaccess/newaccess-for-small-business-owners).

**State Government Resources for Business Owner Wellbeing**

* [VIC – Support for your business](https://www.business.vic.gov.au/support-for-your-business/grants-and-assistance/business-support-package/wellbeing-and-mental-health-support-for-victorian-small-businesses#:~:text=Partners%20in%20Wellbeing%20telephone%20helpline,free%20access%20to%20financial%20counsellors)
* [NSW – Mentally healthy workplaces](https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/businesses-and-employment/mentally-healthy-workplaces)
* [QLD – Business and work wellbeing support](https://www.business.qld.gov.au/running-business/support-assistance)
* [NT – Business and work wellbeing support](https://publicaccountants.sharepoint.com/sites/AdvocacyTechnical/Shared%20Documents/General/Technical%20Resources/Accounting%20Technician/Template/%E2%80%A2%09https%3A/coronavirus.nt.gov.au/business-and-work/wellbeing-support)
* [WA – Managing your wellbeing](https://www.smallbusiness.wa.gov.au/blog/managing-your-wellbeing-business-owner)
* [SA – Mental health and wellbeing](https://www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/health-advice/mental-health-and-wellbeing)
* [TAS – Mental health and wellness](https://www.business.tas.gov.au/manage_a_business/mental_health_and_wellness)