

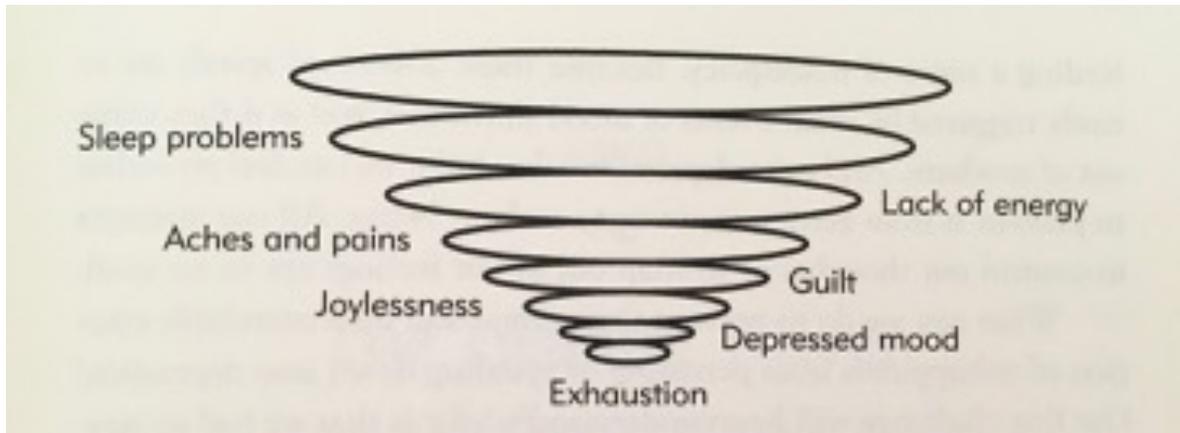


Mindfulness East Bay

Finding the space between stimulus and response

THE EXHAUSTION FUNNEL

This is one of those pictures that is worth 1,000 words. It illustrates how we can spiral down into exhaustion, burnout, and depression as a result of trying to meet the demands of our busy lives.



The top circle (unlabeled) represents a state of normal and healthy balance. The narrowing of the circles represents what happens when we respond to life's demands by pushing ourselves harder, and letting go of our self-care practices. Often the first thing to go when life gets really busy and stressful is **sleep**. We stay up past our normal bedtime getting work done because there wasn't enough time during regular work hours. Or we stay awake scrolling through messages and news feeds on our devices because we're too stressed to be able to fall asleep. And when we finally turn off the lights and our devices, we sleep poorly, because the mind just won't turn off.

Often the next thing we let go of when we're stressed and overwhelmed is **exercise**, either because we've overslept and missed our workout time, or because our sleep-deprived body just doesn't have the energy. But when we don't exercise, we give up another self-care practice that can help manage stress. We become trapped in a vicious cycle of stress. Over time, as we continue to sacrifice the activities that are nourishing but that seem "optional" in our struggle to stay on top of all of the demands coming at us, we become more and more depleted. And the more depleted we become, the less we are able to respond effectively to those demands, leading to feelings of guilt, self-blame, and unhappiness.

The Exhaustion Funnel was first proposed by Professor Marie Asberg of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. She emphasized that those of us who continue downward on this spiral are likely to be "those whose level of self-confidence is closely dependent upon their performance at work," and who are the most committed and conscientious workers, not the slackers of the world.