

Why young worked-up professionals crack



EXPRESS ILLUSTRATION

EVEN before Shree Shetty gets out of bed, the day's to-do list starts vying for her attention. Her barely-awake mind is already juggling what needs to be cooked, her schedule, and pending tasks from previous days. Together, these thoughts cause her to begin her day tired and anxious.

A young digital marketing professional, Shree's mind keeps

switching as she moves frequently between professional and personal roles. While the act of switching is invisible and barely perceptible, it leaves her feeling uneasy. "Every time it happens, I feel like I'm neglecting something on the other side," she admits.

Thoughts of unfinished tasks resurface when she is focused on other tasks,

For young professionals, burnout is about the weight of constant mental switching, missed deadlines, and heavy cognitive loads

leading to self-doubt. Over time, Shree has learnt to recognise this pattern. "I try my best to close as many loops as possible, and switch to simpler tasks so that I don't get stuck," she says.

This relentless tussle leaves her mentally cluttered, physically drained, and emotionally depleted by the end of the day. While she once attributed this to pressure, she now also recognises the role of health conditions.

PCOS and thyroid issues, for instance, are additional causes of stress for women. "Most women you talk to daily are not completely themselves due to constant hormonal fluctua-

tions," she says. Shree is often overwhelmed. While some of it comes from her responsibilities, she admits some is self-induced. "We live with the constant feeling of being outperformed by someone else, possibly because the internet always shows us people doing a hundred times better than us.

So, we set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, and end up feeling overwhelmed because of that," she says.



Micro-stress to Meltdown

Repeated micro-stresses can stack over days and weeks, eventually leading to shifts first in focus, then energy, emotions, and finally behaviour

1

Background buzz

Focus slips more easily than usual, and rest stops feeling fully restorative. You may feel mildly on edge, with a low-level urge to stay busy or distracted, and you start reaching for your phone more often in quiet moments

2

Compression

Small tasks begin to feel heavier, and starting becomes harder than continuing. Tiredness shows up earlier in the day, patience thins, and you begin avoiding minor responsibilities, even while thinking about them constantly.

3



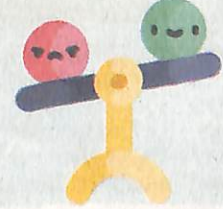
Cognitive drag

Thinking slows and forgetfulness rises, with more "brain fog" and second-guessing. Motivation dips, worry loops get louder, and you pull back from optional activities, social plans, or anything that requires extra effort.

4

Spillover

Conversations and instructions take more effort to track, and sleep either breaks or stops helping. Emotions swing between irritability and numbness, and everyday frictions feel larger, so conflicts rise or avoidance becomes the default.



5



Tipping point

Concentration collapses, and the body either shuts down or becomes agitated. You may blank out, panic, cry, or go flat, and responsibilities drop suddenly because capacity has been exceeded rather than because you "didn't try."

Read the signal, not the attitude

Before stress becomes a breakdown, it often disguises itself as habits people judge, so here is a quick translator for what you might be seeing

What it looks like	What it may signal
Sudden irritability or snapping	Threat response, low emotional bandwidth, or constant pressure with no recovery time
Withdrawing from people or group chats	Fear of judgement, feeling left out already, or wanting safety while emotions settle
Procrastination or "can't start" inertia	Cognitive overload, perfection pressure, or difficulty choosing a first step when stakes feel high.
Overworking and compulsive checking	Control-seeking under uncertainty, fear of making mistakes, or a belief that rest must be earned
Silence in class, meetings, or at home	Shutdown from overwhelm, fear of saying the wrong thing, or a habit of staying invisible to avoid conflict
People-pleasing and instant agreeing	Rejection anxiety, conflict avoidance, or a need to stay "safe" in relationships
Risky choices or sudden rule-breaking	Escape-seeking, pressure to fit in, or using intensity to interrupt numbness or stress
Drop in care for routines and basics	Energy collapse, sleep debt, or feeling stuck in a loop where effort no longer feels worth it