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Stay foolish, stay fit: an excursus on strategies to prevent burnout of mental health professionals

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Burn-Out (BO) is commonly described as a growing situation of work stress and conceptualized as a combination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization/cynicism and reduced personal efficacy. Some professionals are exposed to a higher risk, depending on their specific work mansions (most typically the so called helping professions) and on personal and contextual conditions. Evidence from scientific literature has confirmed that being younger and working in the field of mental health are very significant risk factors for BO. Furthermore, BO is an essential target for preventive strategies: prevention of BO, rather than treatment of potential psychopathological consequences, has been proved to be more effective and cost-effective, though unfortunately very often disregarded or left to individual initiatives.

Physical activity, diet, and other features of a healthy life-style are core targets of interventions aimed at prevention of BO. Increasing evidence is collected on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based techniques and yoga. Supervision, and more specifically Balint-inspired models of group case discussions. Scientific and professional associationism is also effective as a strategy to avoid isolation. Finally, interventions aimed at improving work organization, targeting logistic aspects (eg. time schedules), infrastructures (eg. parking places) or dynamics and human interactions, are also essential and effective.