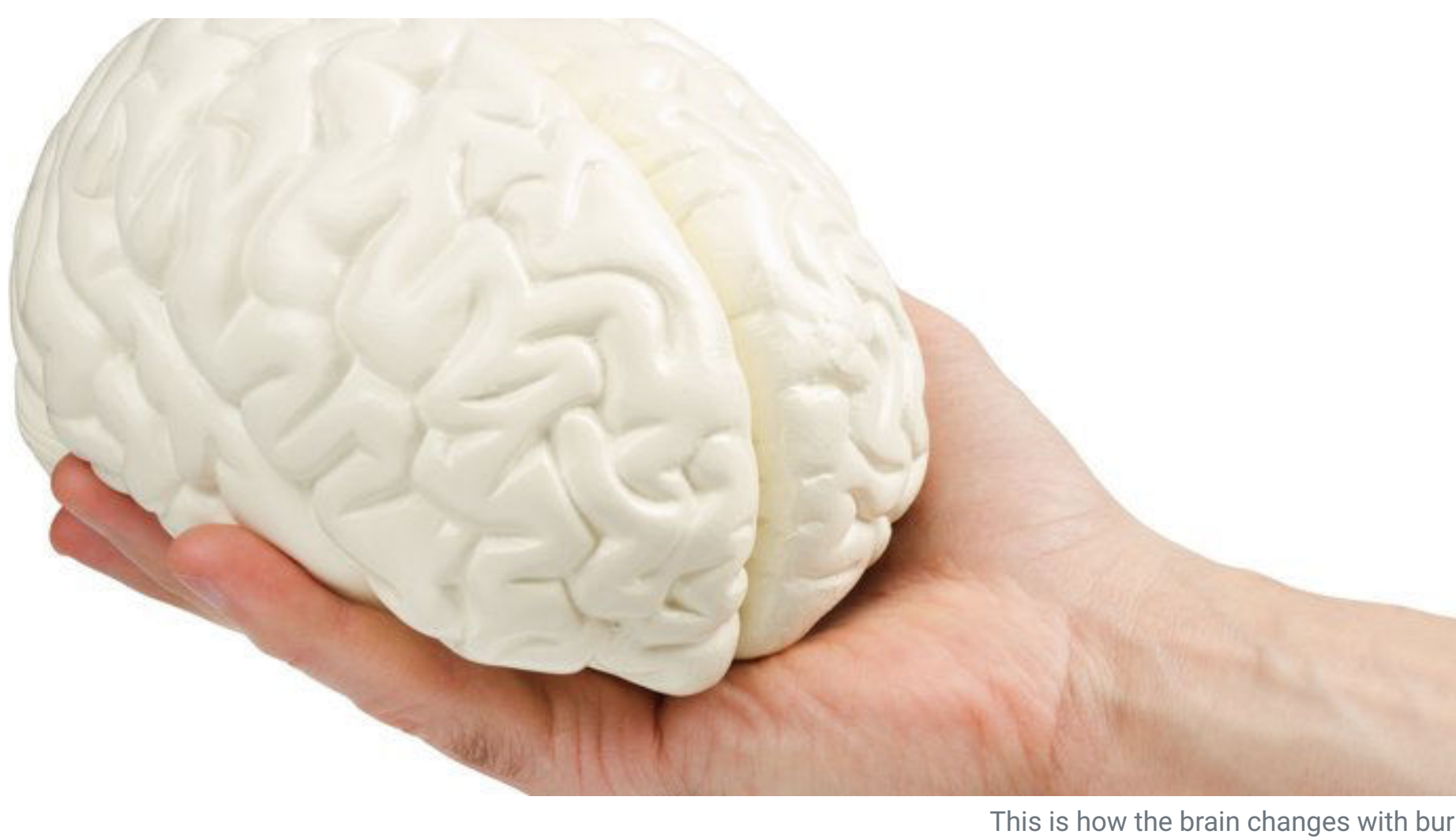


This is how the brain changes with burnout

Lack of sleep and fatigue that can not be rested away are the early warning signs, says researcher and psychologist Agneta Sandström. Fatigue syndrome - what we in everyday speech call burnout - leads to measurable changes in the brain. Agneta Sandström, psychologist and researcher at the County Council in Östersund, has in her studies shown that burnout among other things suffers from impaired working memory and reduced ability to concentrate. The person who has once been affected also becomes very vulnerable - the risk of falling ill again is great.

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This is how the brain changes with burnout

Einar Wiman
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Fatigue syndrome - what we in everyday speech call burnout - leads to measurable changes in the brain. Agneta Sandström, psychologist and researcher at the County Council in Östersund, has in her studies shown that burnout among other things suffers from impaired working memory and reduced ability to concentrate. The person who has once been affected also becomes very vulnerable - the risk of falling ill again is great.

Agneta Sandström, former researcher at Umeå University and currently active in the stroke and brain injury department at the County Council in Östersund, defended her dissertation in 2010 with a dissertation on fatigue syndrome. Her studies showed that burnout, as it is called in everyday speech, provides objectively measurable changes in brain activities.

- We did a neuropsychological investigation that could confirm that the patients had problems with attention and working memory, just as they themselves had reported, says Agneta Sandström.

The patient group also had to do working memory tests while the activity in their brain was measured with a magnetic camera. The results showed that patients with fatigue syndrome had a different pattern of activity compared to both healthy subjects and people who had recently developed depression. The burnout had decreased activity in the frontal lobes and a change in the regulation of the stress hormone cortisol.

Bull-headed and pedantic

Recent research (including at the University of Gothenburg and Karolinska) has confirmed the results, which prove that fatigue syndrome can be diagnosed and that it is something other than ordinary depression.

Agneta Sandström could also state that the patients in her study had many common personality traits that could possibly explain why they have fallen ill.

Annon

- Most of the people in my study had high persistence and were bull-headed, ambitious, accurate and pedantic. Now it is not certain that those who participated in this particular study are representative, many were, for example, highly educated and at group level they had higher education than the average population. But in this group it was clear that they were conscientious and a bit bull-headed, which is perhaps not so strange. If you are someone who gives up when it gets difficult, you will not get sick like this, says Agneta Sandström.

Risk of recurrence

Today, there is no consensus on exactly how burnout should be treated, although it is known that, among other things, team rehabilitation and work-oriented rehabilitation can make people better. Methods used include relaxation exercises, CBT treatments, sleep school and coaching.

- When evaluating the effect of different rehabilitation methods, it is important to be careful with exactly what you measure. In some cases, they have made the mistake of only measuring how many have returned to full-time work, but that does not necessarily mean that they are really healthy, says Agneta Sandström.

What you know, she adds, is that you must not go too fast to return to work - the exposure should increase gradually. The risk that those who have once suffered from fatigue syndrome will fall ill again is very high.

- That is the worst thing about this - those who have once been burnt out carry a vulnerability and become very easily ill again. If this happens, there is a risk that they will crash completely. So the prognosis is unfortunately quite bad, so it is important to proceed cautiously and not be in too much of a hurry to get back to work. In many cases, changing jobs is absolutely necessary.

Lack of sleep clear sign

In other words, fatigue syndrome is a serious illness, and for those who are at risk, it is important to seek help in time. What you should above all be aware of is sleep and any sleep disorders.

- I think that all people who have problems sleeping should review their life situation. Difficulty sleeping is a clear warning sign that you absolutely must do something about it. It is when the sleep disorders come that we begin to experience these changes in brain activities. It is a good benchmark - if you find it difficult to sleep, you must tackle the problem and start managing your life, says Agneta Sandström.

Tags: lack of sleep Work environment burnout Health Agneta Sandström Work life fatigue syndrome

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Einar Wiman
Freelance journalist
Follow the writer

Einar Wiman is a freelance journalist and reporter at Motivation.se. He is a trained journalist at Lund University and has a background as a general reporter, sports journalist and Italian Swede. In terms of football, Einar prefers the Italian style - filming, finesse and prima donna.

Contact: einar@motivation.se

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