

# Compassion Fatigue in Oncological Nursing

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## Abstract

Compassion fatigue is a phenomena characterized as an emotional, physical, and spiritual depletion resulting from chronic exposure to suffering and sustained empathetic caring. It is detrimental to the well-being of nurses as well as other health care professionals; it is also indirectly toxic to patient safety and satisfaction as well as health care organizations. Oncological nurses are suspected to be particularly vulnerable to compassion fatigue considering the experience of intense and protracted losses as well as other elements involved with working in the specialty area. The purpose of this literature review is to compile and synthesis the evidence regarding the prevalence of compassion fatigue among oncological nurses, with a particular focus on the impact of self-care strategies in the prevention, improvement, and/or reversal of associated symptoms.

## Aims

- Investigate the prevalence and relevance of compassion fatigue among nurses in the field of oncology.
- Examine researched means to prevent, reduce and/or reverse symptoms of compassion fatigue with special attention to self-care methods.
- Compile and synthesize research findings in the field.

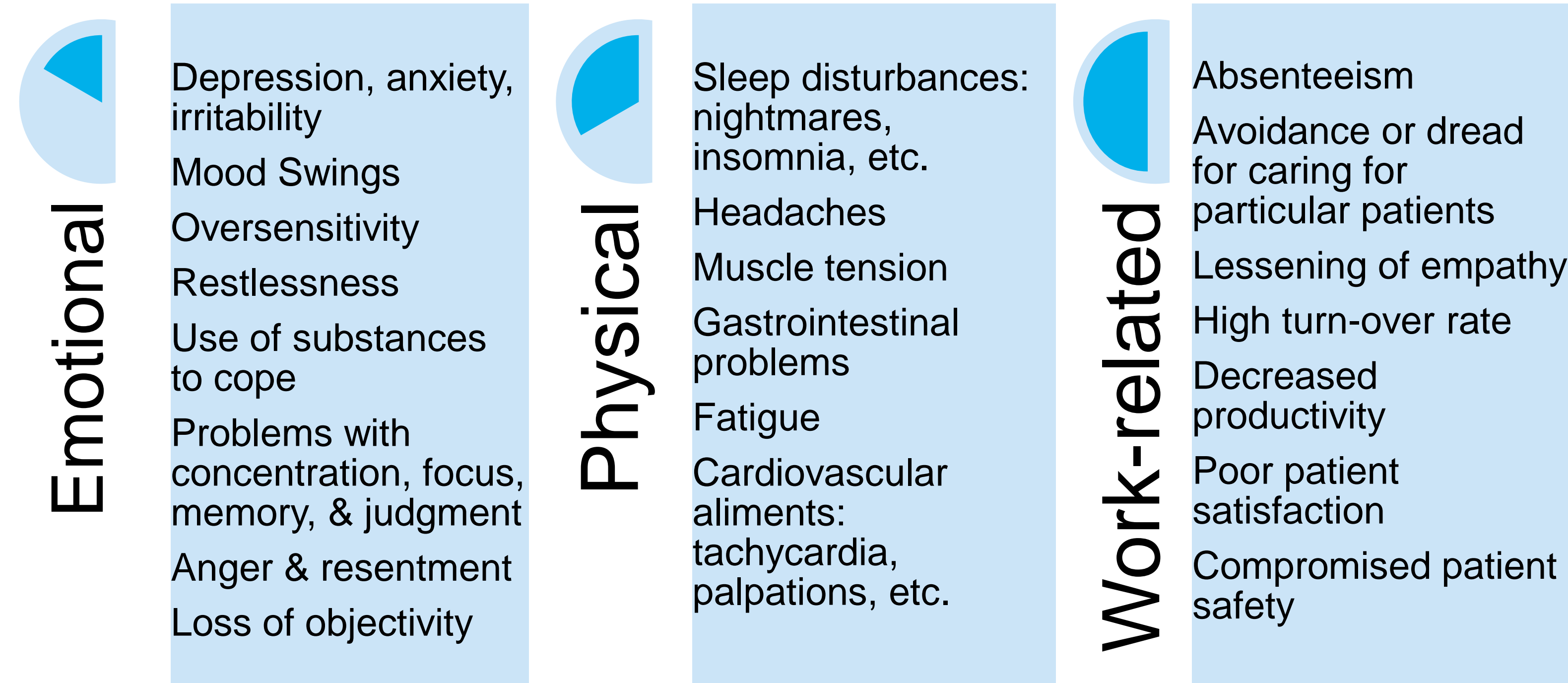
## Clarification of Terms

- *Compassion fatigue*: emotional, physical, and spiritual depletion resulting from the repeated, prolonged vicarious experiencing of suffering and pain that occurs during provision of care and that can result in a debilitating weariness and eventual emotional exhaustion.
- *Self-care activities*: activities aimed to replenish and promote physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

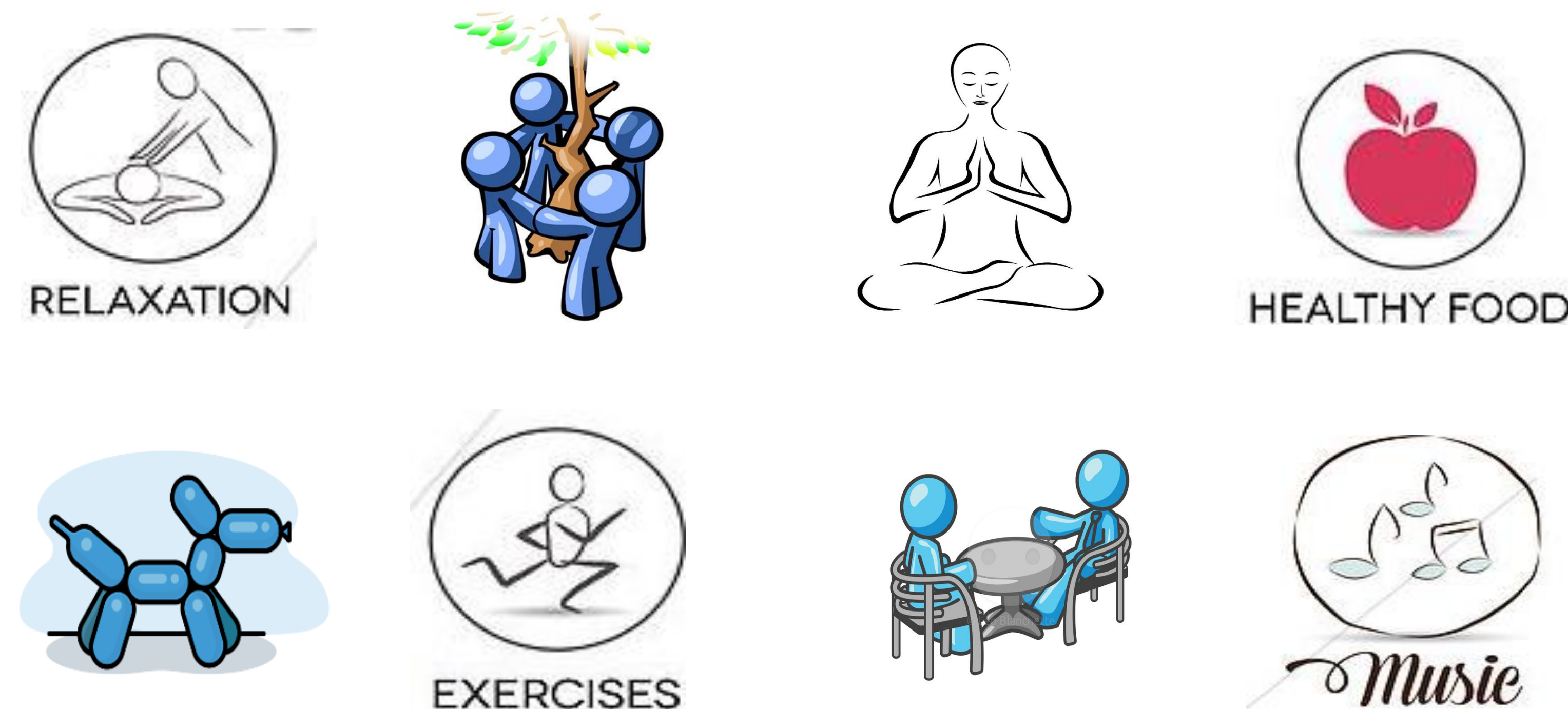


## Does the practice of self-care activities aid in the experience of compassion fatigue among oncology nurses?

### Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue



### Strategies to Combat Compassion Fatigue



## Results

The review of literature revealed that compassion fatigue is contingent on an interplay of variables. Studies have demonstrated that the follow factors have a positive protective effect on compassion fatigue.

- Self-care practices: health eating, exercise, quality sleep, meditation, stress-management skills, cognitive reframing, creative expression, & coping skills;
- Personal traits & attitudes: resilience, hardiness, maturity, neutral attitude regarding death, & a clear 'purpose of life';
- Interpersonal styles: maintaining professional boundaries, secure attachment style, & assertiveness style;
- Work environment: team collaboration, organizational commitment, & debriefing;
- Social support system: mentoring, coaching, close personal contacts, & professional counseling.

### Nursing Practice Implications

- ✓ Nurses need to be able recognize states associated with compassion fatigue within themselves and in peers.
- ✓ They should understand the full extent and impact of this phenomenon, including which nurses are most at-risk and the necessity to seek early intervention should problems arise.
- ✓ It is also critical that nurses routinely practice basic self-care activities, which includes seeking social support.
- ✓ Practicing behaviors that embody compassion for Self and Other, as demonstrated in Watson's Theory of Human Caring, are likely to protect against compassion fatigue.

## Conclusion

Overall, this project demonstrates the need for increased investigation regarding compassion fatigue and elements that precipitate this phenomena among oncology nurses. Likewise, additional research is necessary to definitively determine the effectiveness of protective measures and interventions among this subset of nurses. Finally, devoted attention is also needed to develop a theory that can adequately account for the complex nature of compassion fatigue, including the interaction of variables that effect overall outcomes.