



Time management: Tips to reduce stress and improve productivity

By Mayo Clinic staff

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Effective time management is a primary means to a less stressful life. These practices can help you reduce your stress and reclaim your personal life.

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Do you find yourself overwhelmed by the number and complexity of projects that need to be completed at work each day? As the day flies by, do you often feel as if you haven't paid enough attention to each task because other tasks keep landing on your desk, co-workers interrupt you with questions or you can't get it all organized?

You probably know that managing your time effectively will help you get more done each day. But it has important health benefits, too. By managing your time more wisely, you can minimize stress and improve your quality of life.

But how do you get back on track when organizational skills don't come naturally? To get started, choose one of these strategies, try it for two to four weeks and see if it helps. If it does, consider adding another one. If not, try a different one.

- **Plan each day.** Planning your day can help you accomplish more and feel more in control of your life. Write a to-do list, putting the most important tasks at the top. Keep a schedule of your daily activities to minimize conflicts and last-minute rushes.

- **Prioritize your tasks.** Time-consuming but relatively unimportant tasks can consume a lot of your day. Prioritizing tasks will ensure that you spend your time and energy on those that are truly important to you.
- **Say no to nonessential tasks.** Consider your goals and schedule before agreeing to take on additional work.
- **Delegate.** Take a look at your to-do list and consider what you can pass on to someone else.
- **Take the time you need to do a quality job.** Doing work right the first time may take more time upfront, but errors usually result in time spent making corrections, which takes more time overall.
- **Break large, time-consuming tasks into smaller tasks.** Work on them a few minutes at a time until you get them all done.
- **Practice the 10-minute rule.** Work on a dreaded task for 10 minutes each day. Once you get started, you may find you can finish it.
- **Evaluate how you're spending your time.** Keep a diary of everything you do for three days to determine how you're spending your time. Look for time that can be used more wisely. For example, could you take a bus or train to work and use the commute to catch up on reading? If so, you could free up some time to exercise or spend with family or friends.
- **Limit distractions.** Block out time on your calendar for big projects. During that time, close your door and turn off your phone, pager and email.
- **Get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly.** A healthy lifestyle can improve your focus and concentration, which will help improve your efficiency so that you can complete your work in less time.
- **Take a time management course.** If your employer offers continuing education, take a time management class. If your workplace doesn't have one, find out if a local community college, university or community education program does.
- **Take a break when needed.** Too much stress can derail your attempts at getting organized. When you need a break, take one. Take a walk. Do some quick stretches at your workstation. Take a day of vacation to rest and re-energize.

Ask for professional help

If you're too frazzled to think about trying any of these tips, it's time to ask for help. Does your life feel totally out of control? If so, contact your employee assistance program (EAP) at your workplace for assistance, or discuss your situation with your doctor.

+ References

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