

Time management and prioritisation



Stress is a physiological and psychological response to demands and is very common. While some stress, like the rush of adrenaline before a presentation, can be motivating, chronic or overwhelming stress can negatively impact our physical and mental health. Effectively managing your time and setting realistic goals can be powerful tools in reducing stress and promoting wellbeing.

Time management and prioritisation are intertwined skills that empower you to take charge of your day. Time management involves organising and planning how you allocate your time to complete tasks. Prioritisation involves identifying the most important tasks and ensuring they receive the dedicated time and focus they deserve. You can prioritise your to-do list by categorising them into four areas known as the quadrants of time management:

1. Urgent and important
2. Not urgent yet important
3. Urgent but not important
4. Not urgent and not important

By mastering these skills, you can:

Reduce stress

Feeling overwhelmed and behind schedule is a major stressor. Effective time management reduces that feeling, creating a sense of control and accomplishment.

Boost productivity

When you prioritise tasks and allocate time effectively, you can accomplish more in a shorter period. This leads to a sense of progress and achievement.

Improve wellbeing

Feeling organised and in control of your time contributes to a sense of calm and reduces stress-related anxiety and burnout.

5 tips to help you reduce stress and set realistic goals

1. Embrace the power of lists

A simple to-do list, categorised by priority, can significantly reduce mental clutter. Crossing off completed tasks provides a sense of accomplishment and keeps you focused.

2. Set SMART goals

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound goals are achievable and motivating. Unrealistic goals can lead to frustration and discouragement, increasing stress.

3. Schedule time for self-care

It's important to make time in your day to take care of yourself including activities that promote relaxation and wellbeing. This might include exercise, catching up with a friend, cooking yourself a nutritious meal, getting a massage, getting outside in nature, reading a book or meditating.

4. Learn to say "no"

Setting boundaries and declining requests that overload your schedule is essential – both at work and in your personal life. You need to protect your time to avoid overwhelm and burnout. Learning to politely say "no" or "not right now" when new tasks are added to your list can help you set healthy boundaries and stay in control.

5. Practice mindfulness

Techniques like meditation or deep breathing can help manage stress in the moment and improve focus, leading to increased productivity and reduced anxiety.

Becoming a master of time management and prioritisation is a journey, not a destination. Experiment with different techniques, find out what works best for you, and refine your approach over time. By taking control of your time and setting realistic goals, you can significantly reduce stress and create a life that is both productive and fulfilling.

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