Time Management Can Ease Stress

Managing your time effectively helps you get more done each day. It has important health benefits, too. You can minimize stress and improve your quality of life by managing your time more wisely. To get started, the Mayo Clinic website suggests you 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.** 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 rushing. Planning your day can help you accomplish more and feel more in control.

- **Prioritize your tasks.** Time-consuming but relatively unimportant tasks can take up a lot of your day. Prioritizing tasks will ensure that you spend your time and energy on those that are truly important to you.

- **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.

- **Learn to say no.** 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 it right.** Doing your best the first time may take more time up front, but it takes even more to correct errors and make revisions.

- **Evaluate how you're spending your time.** Look for time that can be used more wisely by keeping a diary of everything you do for three days. Revise your schedule to eliminate or cut back on activities that take up too much time and are nonproductive.

- **Limit distractions.** Block out time on your calendar for big projects. During that time, close your door and turn off your phone, computer, 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 break when needed.** Too much stress can disrupt your attempts at getting organized. When you need a break, take one. Reward your accomplishments with an activity you enjoy.

Strategies to Help You Deal With Stress

We all know what stress is and how it makes us feel. As nurses you know about the “fight or flight response” - the autonomic nervous system’s response to stress. Activated in emergency situations, it causes physiological changes to allow the body to combat stressful situations. However, “prolonged activation of the stress response causes wear and tear on the body – both physical and emotional” (Cleveland Clinic, 2015, para. 2). Adding tests, grades, and studying to your already busy schedules with work and/or children makes it necessary for you to add stress relief to your “To Do” list.

Nurses should also know that living with constant stress can lead to a negative stress reaction condition called distress. Distress can cause physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach problems, sleeplessness, changes in appetite, high blood pressure, chest pain, and sexual dysfunction. Emotional problems like depression, panic attacks, or other forms of anxiety and worry can also occur (“Thirteen tips,” 2014). So, it’s best not to get “stressed out.”
You need to make some changes when you feel like the stress in your life is out of control; stress management can teach you healthier ways to cope with stress. According to Robinson, Smith and Segal (2015) some stress management strategies you may want to try to help lessen your stress include:

### #1 Avoid unnecessary stress
- Avoid people who stress you out.
- Learn how to say “no.”
- Trim your to-do list.

### #2 Alter the situation
- Adjust your attitude.
- Manage your time better.
- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up inside.

### #3 Adapt to the stressor
- Look at the big picture and ask yourself how important it will be in the long run.
- Focus on the positive.
- Adjust your standards; perfection is not possible.

Keep your chin up. No one expected you to save the world, otherwise you would have been born wearing a cape and tights.

### #4 Accept the things you can’t change
- Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.
- Try to look at major challenges as opportunities for personal growth.
- Share your feelings; express what you’re going through even if there’s nothing you can do to change the situation.

### #5 Make time for fun and relaxation
- Set aside time for relaxation.
- Spend time with positive, supportive people.
- Do something you enjoy every day.
- Keep your sense of humor—laughter is the best medicine.

### #6 Adopt a healthy lifestyle
- Reduce caffeine and sugar intake.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy diet.

Planning Will Help Reduce Stress

To be successful, you should have a plan and a back-up plan for some of life’s emergencies, so you can adjust and adapt without any major setbacks. While each of us has to find what works for us, some things to consider include:

- Failing to plan is planning to fail. Have a plan ready in case unexpected events occur.
- Get things done early just in case something comes up that you didn’t plan on. You don’t have the luxury of procrastinating.
- Break the big tasks into smaller ones, so you can accomplish your goal one step at a time with more frequent successes.
- Learn to prioritize based on long-term goals.
- Do whatever you have to do to complete your education. Pace yourself and stay focused.
- Utilize your time appropriately. Decide what’s really important to get done.
- Try not to overload your schedule with difficult or demanding classes or full-time work if at all possible.
- Communicate your goals with your family. Be sure your family understands what you are doing and how important it is to you to continue your education. You need their support to succeed.

Back-up plans are critical to your success. They can help keep you calm in stressful times and make you more flexible and adaptable. Back-up plans are important; that’s why we buy insurance. It’s a back-up plan in case we get sick, have a car accident, or a house fire, because our health, car, and home are important to us. If we have a back-up plan for all of these important things in life, why wouldn’t we have one to make sure we can get to class and work on time every day? School and work should be just as important.

A short list of things you need a Plan A, Plan B, and maybe even a Plan C and D for include transportation, child care, and illness of a child or loved one for whom you are responsible. You need to have and know your options!

Planning ahead is critical for success in school. If you wait until the last minute, you reduce your options and increase your stress. While juggling all that life throws at you, remember that you are not a superhero and perfection is unattainable. You can do many different things with mediocrity or do two or three things with excellence.

References