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Introduction

Studies show that more and more people are feeling the effects of overload. Many of us are experiencing feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout. Our personal and work lives have gotten busier and more hectic, and we all feel pressed for time. That can make us feel overwhelmed and out of control. But life doesn't have to feel that way.

In this booklet, you'll find strategies and advice to help you overcome overload and feel more in control of your life. The good news is that you don't have to make drastic changes to take back your time and feel less stressed. There are dozens of small steps you can take to feel less overloaded. And they don't require a major time commitment. It can be as easy as adopting simple new habits at work and at home.

On the following pages you'll find 10 basic steps to help you overcome overload:

1. Take control
2. Recognize and deal with stress
3. Prioritize
4. Set limits
5. Get organized
6. Make time for yourself
7. Connect with friends and family
8. Manage information overload
9. Be healthy
10. Practice being resilient

You don't have to take all of these steps today, tomorrow, or even next month. Just choose a few small changes you think are manageable and start with those. Then, when you feel ready, make a few more changes. Before you know it you'll be feeling less overloaded and you'll feel better overall.

1 Take control



One of the first changes you can make doesn't even require you to actually *do* anything differently. It's about changing your mindset and letting go of the things you can't control.

All of us get frustrated by the things we can't control. A traffic jam that makes you late for work. A negative co-worker. In-laws who complain about your parenting style. By letting go of these things and focusing instead on what you can control, you will learn to be much more resilient and less stressed. Take that negative co-worker, for example. You can't control what he says or how he behaves at work. But you can control your reactions to his behavior. You can let his negativity trigger your anger. Or you can choose to not let it affect you. You can tell yourself, "I can't change how he acts. But I can choose to not let it ruin my day."

When you're faced with people, situations, or events that are out of your control, focus on what you can control: your reaction and your behavior. Remember that you can choose how to react. Your teenage daughter knows how to push your limits, but you choose whether to talk with her calmly or let a dispute grow into a shouting match. And your role at work may change in ways you don't like, but it is you who reacts in a negative way or accepts that change and looks for the opportunities it offers.

2 Recognize and deal with stress



A recent study by the American Psychological Association showed that although 47 percent of Americans are concerned about the levels of stress in their lives, only half of them reported that they are making an effort to manage it.

Stress affects all of us. And if we don't learn to recognize and deal with it, stress can take a toll on our health, our relationships, our job performance, and our happiness. In this chapter you'll read about how to recognize your own personal signs of stress. You'll also learn some tips and techniques for dealing with stress. Try these strategies until you find a few that work for you. Then you'll always know just what to do when you're feeling overloaded and stressed out.

Recognizing the signs of stress

The only way to begin to manage stress is to become aware of it in yourself. Sometimes we get so caught up in the daily struggle to stay on top of responsibilities at work and home that we don't even realize that we're under stress. This can be dangerous because if you don't know you're under stress, that means you're not doing anything to manage it.

Everyone reacts to stress differently. Below is a list of common stress reactions. Do you recognize any of these physical, psychological, or behavioral symptoms of stress?

- difficulty sleeping
- headaches
- neck or back pain
- muscle tension
- chest pains
- heart palpitations or shortness of breath
- stomach pain or upset stomach
- constipation or diarrhea
- sweaty hands or feet
- trembling, nervous tics
- frequent teeth grinding
- increased menstrual symptoms and more extreme PMS
- decreased sexual drive
- irritability or hostility

- anger
- depression
- fatigue, even if you have had sufficient sleep
- floating anxiety (you are anxious or afraid but are not sure why)
- rapid emotional swings
- binge eating or food cravings
- overpowering urge to cry, run, or hide
- drug or alcohol abuse
- increase in smoking
- increase in use of prescription drugs
- overexercising
- withdrawal from activities that were once pleasurable

Pay attention to how you feel, think, and act when you're under stress. Do you tend to snap at your child or partner? Have trouble concentrating at work? Do you overeat or forget to eat? Most people—up to 85 percent—report trouble sleeping when they are under stress.

If left untreated, many of the stress reactions listed above can lead to more serious physical or emotional problems, such as depression. That's why it's so important to learn ways to deal with stress as soon as you recognize it.

It's also important to deal with stress at its roots. For example, if meetings with your manager always leave you tense because you're not sure what she thinks of your work, you could schedule a meeting and ask for more feedback. If arguments with your partner cause stress that lasts all day, you could work on improving your communication skills or find a couples therapist who can help you resolve the issues that are leading to your arguments.

Other signs of stress and overload

There are other, less obvious signs that you may be overloaded and stressed. These have to do with how you are living your life and the decisions that you make every day. They might include

- *Being overscheduled.* We need to live by schedules during our workday. We need to keep appointments, pay our bills on time, and get to the supermarket before it closes. But we also need to learn when to let schedules go. This is especially important if you feel like you don't have any free time for yourself. **Tip:** Designate at least two hours every weekend as “free” time for you and your family or friends to do something pleasurable. No chores, errands, tasks, or scheduled activities.
- *Falling into the “no-sleep/more-caffeine” spiral.* To make time for everything we need to do, many of us deprive ourselves of needed sleep, either by deliberately staying up late to read, study, watch TV, or work, or by losing sleep to anxiety. Then we drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages to stay alert, which only makes it harder to fall asleep the next night. This combination of caffeine and sleep deprivation leaves us running on empty, open to inaccuracy, errors, and accidents. It also makes us more prone to feel anxious or irritable, which can affect relationships at work and at home. **Tip:** Starting tonight, go to bed 30 minutes earlier than usual. Keep it up for a week and see if you feel more rested and less stressed.
- *Feeling like you have no time for friends, family, or yourself.* If you wish you had more time to be with friends or family or if you are neglecting yourself—skipping meals, or giving up exercise, reading, or other favorite activities—because you are too busy, you are overloaded. **Tip:** Look over the suggestions about making time for yourself in chapter 6 (page 40) and about maintaining relationships with friends and family in chapter 7 (page 44). Make a list of five simple suggestions you think might work for you. Start by choosing one idea and commit to doing it on a regular basis, even if it's just once a month. When you've worked that into your routine, you can move on to the others.

More tips and techniques for managing stress

You probably already have a few techniques for dealing with stress. Perhaps you know that a session at the gym, a hot bath, or a quick call to a close friend is the best way to help you feel more relaxed when you're under pressure. The basics—getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating a healthy diet—also go a long way toward keeping you resilient and able to deal with stress and overload. Read more about these in chapter 9 (page 52).

There are more ways to manage stress. In the section that follows, you'll find lots of ideas. Not all of them will work for you, but hopefully you will find a few new tips that you can add to your toolbox of techniques for coping with stress.

Relaxation techniques

Relaxation is a skill just like driving a car or riding a bicycle. You may have to practice awhile before it really begins to work. But once you learn some relaxation techniques and begin to use them on a regular basis, you can change the way your body reacts to stress and overload so you'll feel more relaxed every day. Here are some techniques that you might want to try:

- *Deep breathing.* Studies show that deep breathing is one of the most effective ways to deal with stress and anxiety. Take slow, deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling completely. As you breathe, allow the muscles in your body to relax. A deep-breathing session—even one as brief as a minute—can help you calm down and face your work and home demands more effectively. And the best thing about deep breathing is that you can do it anytime, anyplace.
- *Meditation.* Use a break at work or at home for meditation. Find a quiet space with a comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes and try to clear your thoughts of the frustrations you face. Choose a word or phrase, such as “peace” or “calm,” or a short passage of inspirational writing, and repeat it to yourself as you breathe slowly and rhythmically. Even a few minutes of quiet meditation can help you refocus with fresh energy.

The benefits of yoga

Yoga is designed to build strength, flexibility, and awareness. Research shows that regular practice of yoga can also be a good way to combat stress. If you're interested in learning more about yoga, take a class at a local yoga center, your gym or health club, a community center, or your local Y. You can also find out more online, at sites like www.mydailyyoga.com, which has quick yoga stretches you can do at your desk.

- *Visualization.* Instead of meditating by repeating a word or phrase, use positive and soothing images to rid yourself of anxiety. Imagine yourself in a situation you find relaxing—on an empty beach, for example, or in a garden—or create an image of a restful object, like a candle. Breathe slowly and evenly as you keep this picture in your mind.
- *Prayer.* If prayer is important to you, you might use it during times of stress as a way to collect yourself. A book of written prayers or devotional material can help you focus if your mind is racing and you feel overwhelmed.
- *Stretching.* Take periodic breaks to loosen muscles that have become tight because of tension. Stand and stretch your arms over your head. Tip your head from side to side slowly. Open your mouth as wide as you can to unclench your jaw muscles. Stretch your fingers backward to loosen muscles tightened by typing or precise work with your hands.
- *Massage.* With your fingers, massage the muscles at the back of your neck, your jaw, temples, at the back of your head, or wherever else you feel tension. If you can, have a friend or your partner gently knead the muscles in your shoulders and along your back.

Four quick stress busters

Use these quick techniques whenever you feel stressed at work or home:

1. Count 10 slow, deep breaths.
2. Do five slow, small circles with your head, stretching out your neck muscles.
3. Stop what you are doing and get up. Walk around your office or go to another room for just a few minutes.
4. Picture yourself in a place you find relaxing.

Scheduling time for relaxation

All of these relaxation techniques are effective, and you'll find that some work especially well for you. But none of them will work if you don't make the time for them. Once you've tried a few techniques and settled on one or two to practice more, think about how you will work them into your schedule. The key to using relaxation techniques is to do them two or three times a day.

You might try a relaxation exercise before you get out of bed at the start of the day, during a break at work, when you get home from work, or as you get ready for bed. Whatever times you choose, protect them in your schedule as high-priority relaxation breaks. If you wait for the time to open up in your schedule, you may never get to them.

Finally, avoid unhealthy ways of dealing with stress. Sometimes stress can cause people to engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, doing drugs, overeating, or overspending. These unhealthy stress reactions can actually make stress worse because they never solve the underlying problems and may even cause new problems, including addiction.

Dealing with overload at work

You aren't alone if you often feel overloaded at work. About one-third of all U.S. workers feel they have too much to do, according to a study by the Families and Work Institute. Overload at work doesn't just make work less enjoyable and more stressful. It can also affect your productivity, your relationship with your manager and co-workers, and your overall happiness in both your personal and work lives.

The first step in gaining control over your work is realizing that you really can make changes that will reduce your feelings of overload. Many people think that being overloaded is just an unavoidable reality. But it doesn't have to be. In this section you'll read about steps you can take to manage your workload so that you feel more in control and less overwhelmed.

- *Keep track of your workload.* Begin to address overload at work by keeping a log of the time that you spend on each of your work-related tasks every day for a week, including work that you bring home. At the end of the week, go back and add up the hours that you devote to each task. Then decide whether there are obvious ways you could use your time more efficiently. For example, if you see that you were in three separate meetings about one project, could you have addressed all of those issues in one meeting?
- *Talk to your manager.* Schedule a meeting with your manager to talk about your workload. Try to come to the meeting prepared with some ideas so you are proposing solutions rather than complaining. Can some responsibilities be shifted? Can your manager help you prioritize so you know what to tackle first? Can a deadline be extended? Is there a software program that would make your job easier?
- *Get organized.* Disorganization can easily lead to wasted time, stress, and feelings of overload. The tips in chapter 5 (page 36) are designed to help you get organized at work.

- *Delegate as much as you can.* Review the section on delegating at work in chapter 4 (page 26).
- *Improve your communication skills.* Learn how to ask for guidance and support when you need it and to communicate clearly and carefully so you don't waste time repeatedly explaining things.
- *Cut down on distractions and interruptions.* Studies show that most workers waste several hours a day on distractions, such as incoming calls or e-mails or co-workers who stop by to chat. Try closing your door or hanging a "do not disturb" sign by your desk. Set your phone to go to voice mail when you need to concentrate. Politely let co-workers know that you are busy and can't talk. Smile and say, "I'm on deadline. Can I catch up with you later?"
- *Cut down on multitasking.* Research shows that multitasking actually decreases productivity and increases errors and can increase feelings of overload. Try to focus on one thing at a time.
- *Leave work at work.* If you are in the habit of bringing work home with you, begin to cut back. Commit to designating one or two evenings a week as "work-free" nights, then build up to more. You may find that by working less you'll actually get more done because you'll feel more focused and energized when you are at work.

Finally, if personal issues—such as a chronic illness, caring for an aging relative, or parenting—are causing you to feel overloaded at work, get the help and support you need. Look into resources in your community, such as after-school programs, support groups, or local councils on aging. The program that sent you this booklet may also be able to provide helpful resources and information.

3 Prioritize



To deal with overload and regain a sense of control, we need to figure out what's most important to us—our priorities—and take care of those things first.

There are two ways to think about priorities: everyday priorities and longer-term, lasting priorities. Everyday priorities are things like returning important phone calls at work in a timely manner or getting home on time for a meal with your partner or family. Longer-term priorities are the things that you value the most and make you feel good, such as doing volunteer work in your community or spending time on a favorite activity. In this section you'll find tips and strategies for figuring out what both your everyday and longer-term priorities are and how to find time for them.

Everyday priorities

So much of what we do every day is reacting, or putting out fires. When what seems like an urgent matter comes up, we tend to drop everything and deal with it. But eventually, everything starts to feel urgent. By maintaining a calendar system and learning how to separate truly urgent tasks from those that can wait, you can feel more in control of your time.

The best way to keep track of your day-to-day priorities is to make to-do lists and keep a calendar. Everyone has a different system for keeping track of the things they need to do each day or week. You might find that a planner is the way to go or you might be fine with just a pad of paper that you keep close at hand in your kitchen or at your desk. The following tips will help you no matter what kind of to-do list you use.

- *Develop a calendar system that works for you.* If you have a family, you may find that keeping one calendar with color-coded entries for home and work is best. This way you'll be able to foresee and avoid scheduling conflicts between work and home. You may find that a regular wall calendar posted in a central location of your home

works well or that a personal digital assistant (PDA), computer-based calendar, or day planner is the best option. Experiment with different systems until you find the right one.

- *Keep two to-do lists, one for home and one for work.* If you try to combine them you may get confused or overwhelmed. However, it's a good idea to keep your separate to-do lists in the same notebook, planner, or electronic organizer so you have all of your information in the same place and can easily refer to it throughout the day.
- *Arrange your to-do lists by priority.* Put the most critical things on top and the less important tasks lower down. When your list is long, you may want to group more pressing items into an "A" category and prioritize within that.
- *Take a few minutes at the beginning of each week to review the week ahead.* Update your list of things to do and check your calendar so you know what's coming up.
- *Spend the first or last 10 minutes of every workday making a prioritized to-do list.* Check your e-mail and voice mail for any urgent matters, then map out your day according to your priorities. If you take public transportation to work, you can do this on the bus or train.

Making a prioritized to-do list

A prioritized to-do list can help you distinguish truly urgent tasks and goals from those that are lower priority. Here's how to make a to-do list that really works:

1. List all of your outstanding tasks and duties as specifically as possible. (Draft sales report. Respond to co-worker's question. Return phone calls. Read trade magazines.)
2. Take a critical look at your to-do list and ask yourself the following questions about each item: What would happen if I put this off until tomorrow? Or next week? What would happen if I never got to this at all?
3. Use your answers to the questions above to determine which tasks are the most critical and put those at the top of your list.
4. As you build your prioritized list, also think about how you could accomplish your tasks in a more efficient way. Could you outsource some work? Address several outstanding issues during a single meeting instead of scheduling multiple meetings?

Longer-term priorities

Unfortunately, when we are overloaded, we tend to lose sight of our longer-term or life priorities. These are the people and activities that make us happy, the things that *really* matter at home and at work. When we don't make time for these priorities, we may feel unhappy or unfulfilled, which only causes us to feel more stressed and overloaded.

Everyone has different priorities. Yours might be spending time with friends or family, advancing your career, taking care of yourself through diet and exercise, or being involved in your community.

Try using the chart below to list what is most important to you in the different parts of your life. In the spaces to the right, write down activities or tasks you'd like more time for in each part of your life. It might be a special project at work, developing and encouraging the people who work with you, becoming more involved in community activities, working with your child to overcome a reading problem, or taking courses toward a degree.

Professional/work

My own well-being
and growth

Family/friends

Other relationships

Community/citizen

Other

Here are some questions that can help you think about your priorities:

- What are the big things and small things that you want that extra time for?
- How would you spend your time if you could clear your schedule, eliminate many of the day-to-day demands, and start over?
- How do you want others to perceive you?

Setting goals based on what's important

You probably have mixed feelings after listing how you'd like to spend your time. On the one hand, it can feel good to remind yourself of what is most important to you. But it can also be frustrating to be reminded of how absorbed you are in activities that may not seem very important to you. So where do you find the time to focus on what's important?

Making a wish list like the one on pages 18 and 19 is a good first step. Instead of simply feeling unhappy that you don't have enough time, you now have something concrete to work toward. The next step is to turn the wish list into a set of goals to act on.

Setting goals can be an effective way of helping yourself get to what's important. Goals give you the first outline of an action plan. Look back to your list of things you wish you had more time for and think about how you might turn those "wants" into realistic and specific goals. For example, if one of the things you wish you had more time for is your children, you might turn it into the goal of "get home for supper four nights a week."

Write down a few of your goals in the space below.

Now that you've done some prioritizing and set some goals, the next step is to begin to live by those goals. Moving from goals to action takes work, but the tips and strategies in this booklet will help you make time for the things that are important to you by helping you learn how to overcome overload and build a more balanced life.

Setting goals

One good guide for setting goals is to use the S.M.A.R.T. system. Set goals that are Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time-limited.

- *Specific goals* are clear and narrow enough to guide you. For example, "Meet once a week with each member of my work team" is a specific goal. "Become a more attentive manager" is probably too general to be useful.
- *Measurable goals* allow you to see how you're doing. "Finish at least five paintings by the end of the year" is a measurable goal. "Spend more time on my painting" is not, and may leave you wondering if you've reached your goal.
- *Action-oriented goals* focus on steps to take. "Join a hiking club this fall" is an action-oriented goal. "Make new friends" may be too vague to act on.
- *Realistic goals* are within reach, though they may stretch you. "Clean out the basement this fall" might be a realistic goal for you, while "Get the house in order" may be too large to handle.
- *Time-limited goals* have deadlines or time horizons. "Lose 10 pounds over the next three months" is a time-limited goal. "Lose 10 pounds," without a time horizon, plays into our tendency to put things off.

4 Set limits



Even the most organized person can't do it all. There are always new demands for our time and energy at work and at home. That's why it's so important to learn how to set limits.

There are three main ways to set limits:

- Learning to say “no.”
- Setting boundaries.
- Delegating at work and at home.

In this chapter you'll find tips for setting limits so you can spend your valuable time on the things that are most important to you.

Learning to say “no”

Most of us were taught as children that it was bad or rude to say “no.” Consequently, we often find ourselves saying “yes” to requests even when we know we just don't have the time. By always being agreeable and “nice,” we are agreeing to live with overload and anxiety. We are agreeing to weaker performance and the risk of serious mistakes when our resources are stretched too thin. And we are agreeing to give up our personal and family time. Saying “yes” to somebody else can mean saying “no” to your own needs and those of your family, and to your most important personal and professional goals.

This is especially common at work, because many people fear that saying “no” to a co-worker or manager gives the impression that they can't handle their jobs or that they are incompetent. But it's possible to say “no” in positive and helpful ways that will leave people with the impression that you are in control of your time and your workload.

Here are some tips for saying “no” in a way that will leave both you and the person asking for your time satisfied:

- *Don't automatically say "yes."* Whether it's a request to take on a new project at work or an invitation to join a committee at your child's school, when someone asks you for your time, tell them you'll get back to them in a few minutes, an hour, or even tomorrow, depending on the urgency of the request. This way you'll have an opportunity to review your schedule, think about your priorities and tasks, and give an honest answer about your availability. Just be sure to follow up with your response.
- *Be honest, direct, and firm.* Don't say "yes" when you feel "no," and never say "maybe" just to put off saying "no" until later. You know you haven't been direct enough when a person you think you've said "no" to keeps asking you to say "yes." Statements like, "No. That won't work. I already have plans this weekend," make your position clear.
- *Be brief.* The longer you talk, the more you open yourself to giving in and accepting additional, unwanted responsibility. Develop an "exit strategy" for ending a conversation, such as "I've got to run. Hope we can get together soon!"
- *Use non-verbal language,* including good eye contact and firm, non-threatening body language. Assertive people look others in the eye without constant staring. They have a relaxed body and are confident in their statements. Avoid sending signals of defensiveness or wavering in your body language, by looking down and bowing your head, for example. And avoid confrontational postures such as finger-pointing and crossed arms.
- *Add a positive spin to "no."* Instead of just saying, "No, I can't do it," add a positive statement. For example, if you are asked to join a workplace group that is analyzing a new product but you don't have the time, you can say, "I'm really interested in this project and I'd like to help out but I just can't commit to being a full member of the team. However, I'd like to help with testing once you've narrowed down the choices."

- *Find a “third right answer.”* Sometimes the best answer is neither “yes” nor “no.” You might work with the person who needs help to come up with another solution to the problem, one that addresses her needs without overloading you. You could offer your resources but not your time or suggest another person who might be better suited for the task. Or your answer might be a qualified “yes”: You can help with the new account, but only if someone else takes over one of your other accounts.

Setting boundaries

For most people who work a demanding job, it’s often difficult to keep work from spilling over into the rest of life. This is only natural. When you care about your work, you don’t just turn it off at the end of the day and stop thinking about it. But when you’re overloaded, the boundaries between work and home can become too blurred. Work can creep into your evenings and weekends, making it hard to really focus on anything else, including your family and friends. Learning how to set and maintain boundaries between your work and personal lives is an important step toward overcoming overload. Here are some ideas that can help:

- *Find ways to separate from work at the end of your workday.* You might use your drive home from work to switch moods—by listening to music you like or spending quiet time in the car reflecting. Avoid making business calls on your cell phone on the way home for safety’s sake and so that you get a chance to get out of work mode on your way home. To decompress from work, some people change their clothes when they get home, take a short rest alone, do some stretches, or go for a brief walk to get some air and space.
- *Work out with your manager when you’re on duty and when you’re off duty.* If your manager or other co-workers are in the habit of contacting you in the evenings or on the weekends, find a way to set tighter boundaries around your time off. For example, you could let

Establishing boundaries when you work from home

It can be hard to turn work off when you work from home because it's always right there. It may help to develop some routines to help you make the transition from work to home, even if your workplace is your home. Some telecommuters make a point of shutting down their computers and leaving the house to walk the dog at the end of the workday or

spend some time reading the newspaper. Others transition back into parenting by sitting down with their children for a few minutes before starting to prepare the evening meal. It doesn't really matter what you do. What's important is that you create some kind of routine that helps you ease back into your personal life at the end of each day.

co-workers know that you won't be available after 6 p.m. on weekdays but you'll respond to any message first thing in the morning. Then stay off duty—don't check e-mail or voice mail when you're not working. Use your e-mail out-of-office message or voice mail to let people know when they can expect a response from you.

- *Remember to also set boundaries with friends and family if you need to.* A friend who continually calls you late at night to chat or a family member who insists on getting together every weekend may need to be gently reminded that your time is limited and that you can't always be available. Look back to the previous section on saying “no” for some pointers on how to handle these situations.

Delegating at work and at home

Delegating—entrusting others with tasks to free up our time—is one of the best ways to set limits and deal with overload at home and at work. In this section you'll learn about ways to share responsibilities at home as well as how to delegate at work.

Sharing responsibilities at home

Delegation isn't just for the workplace. It's also an important way of taking care of tasks and responsibilities at home. By taking a good look at what needs to be done and then developing a system for sharing those responsibilities, you can begin to foster a greater sense of teamwork within your family and help overcome feelings of overload and resentment.

- *Begin by believing that all family or household members can participate in household chores and responsibilities.* You can all work together to take care of household tasks. Families and households that work together to get these tasks done, that value the contribution of each member in this process, tend to be strong, connected, and supportive.
- *Take stock together of where you are now.* Make a running list of the tasks you each do and how much time is spent on them. Note who does what and how long it usually takes. Look, too, at who feels ownership for different aspects of managing the household. Taking children to the doctor or paying the bills may not take much time, but feeling that you are the one who must keep track of appointments and rearrange your schedule at home or work to accommodate appointments all of the time can feel overwhelming. Getting this information out in the open can help you think of ways to rebalance responsibilities.
- *Find ways to share the work.* Every family or couple has a different system. You may find that taking turns with tasks (you walk the dog tonight while I cook dinner, and tomorrow we'll switch) or simply dividing up the tasks in a fair way (you are responsible for car maintenance, cooking, and grocery shopping, and I'll do the bills and cleaning) works best for your family. Also, be sure to ask family members what they want to do to pitch in at home. Everyone has preferences and allowing people to do the chores they like the most helps to ensure that tasks will get done with as little conflict as possible.
- *If you have children, give them responsibilities, too.* Even young children can be caring and contributing members of a household. Give your child regular chores that are appropriate for her age, and be sure she knows that she plays an important role in your family. If you have young children, you may find that it works well to list their responsibilities in a chart. Then, you can recognize the completion of their chores with stickers or a special treat, such as an outing.

- *Lower your standards and expectations.* If you expect to come home to a sparkling clean, clutter-free home every evening, you are bound to be disappointed. Try to be realistic about your expectations so you don't feel overwhelmed or aggravated by what's not done.
- *Let go of your way of doing things, and accept the ways of others.* You may have a certain way of folding laundry that seems best to you, but you can't force others to adopt your way. If you want help, you have to accept the way others do things.
- *Be appreciative, always giving positive feedback first.* There is no stronger force to encourage changing roles than honest praise and gratitude and recognition of other people's contributions. For example, you might say, "Sean, I'm so glad you helped clean up the kitchen. Now we have more time to play your favorite game." Praise and recognition reinforce the feelings of confidence people get from taking on new roles and responsibilities.
- *Avoid criticism.* Comments like, "Why did you do it that way?" or "You should have done this first" can derail hard-earned progress toward sharing the load. They can make others defensive, resistant, and less likely to want to be cooperative.

Outsourcing

Another possible solution for getting help at home is outsourcing. At work we sometimes solve a workload problem by outsourcing. That same strategy can work at home, too. Think about what you do at home that is causing you to feel overloaded. Is it cooking dinner every night? Mowing the lawn? Washing the dishes? Cleaning the house? Taking care of the car? Now think about people or services that might be available to help relieve some of that pressure.

Can you afford to have someone come in and clean for you every other week? Can you hire a high school student to do yard work or run errands? Pay a neighborhood teenager to watch your child while you grocery shop? Buy takeout food or prepared meals a few times a week instead of cooking? These are all additional expenses on what

may already be a strained budget, but that money might help you feel more in control and it might defuse a source of tension in the household.

Delegating at work for managers

Delegation is an important skill that managers need to learn and use on a daily basis. Effective delegation can:

- help you feel less overloaded
- give others an opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities
- free your time to focus on other important things

Learning to delegate well is also important for your own career advancement. As you move up in the organization, the managers above you watch to see not only whether you get the job done, but also how you get it done. Delegating skills are essential for demonstrating that you can work at this higher level.

Not everything is appropriate for delegation. Do not delegate a task that is so unpleasant, demeaning, or risky that you wouldn't want to do it yourself. Similarly, don't ask people to do something if they don't have the required skills or if they are too overloaded themselves. Work that is clearly your responsibility—a crisis, something that you alone know the history of, or something that is confidential—is best handled by you. Also, do not delegate anything your manager has asked you to handle yourself without first checking with your manager.

If you're not a manager

If delegation isn't an option for you, the other tips on pages 13 and 14 on dealing with overload at work can help.

Keep in mind that, at least in the beginning, letting go of tasks and responsibilities doesn't always immediately result in less work for you. When you delegate you also need to supervise and follow up, which can take time. But once you've learned how to delegate and the people you work with are accustomed to taking on more responsibilities, you should start to feel less overloaded.

Quick tips for managers: Four steps for delegating at work

1. Give a clear description of what needs to be done, including the requirements, deadline, and the objective.
2. Provide the appropriate resources, including where to go for help.
3. Delegate responsibilities, not methods. Remember that there is no one "right way" to do a task.
4. Give feedback. Try to provide coaching throughout the process.

5 Get organized



When we feel overloaded and out of control, we often think, “There’s just not enough time!” But as we all know, there never will be more time. The solution is making the most of the time we have now. Whether you’re at work or at home, one of the best ways to maximize time is to get organized. When you’re organized you aren’t wasting precious moments looking for lost things or making unnecessary trips. And research shows that when you’re organized, you feel less stressed and more productive.

Getting organized isn’t easy. It takes time and planning. But the good news is that—like most of the advice in this booklet—you can do it a little bit at a time. Before you know it, you’ll have made some big changes that will help you feel calmer and in better control at work and at home.

In this chapter you’ll read tips and advice for getting organized at home and at work as well as advice for making the most of your time by avoiding procrastination and simplifying your life.

Getting organized at home

Some people are naturally organized. They know where everything is and they don’t waste time looking for their car keys, important papers, or the remote control. Others need to work at being organized. If you’re in the latter group, the four basic steps outlined below will help you get your home in order.

1. Sort papers as soon as they come in the door.

- *Open or sort your mail every day over the trash or recycling bin* and get rid of junk mail immediately. If possible, shred any papers that have personal information, such as credit card offers.
- *Give each person a basket, folder, or wall-mounted bin for their mail* and put their mail in their container right away.
- *Get rid of newspapers or magazines when the newest issue arrives.* If there are articles you haven’t read yet, tear them out and keep them in a special folder.

2. Reduce clutter.

- *Tackle clutter one room or area at a time* so you don't feel overwhelmed.
- *Get rid of items you don't use anymore*, including clothes, old toys, kitchen appliances, and anything else that takes up space. Store the items you want to keep in an out-of-the-way spot. Keep a shopping bag in your clothes closet and put items you don't use anymore in the bag as you find them. When the bag is full, give it to a charitable organization.
- *Spend 10 minutes every evening doing a "clutter sweep."* Go through your main rooms and put away everything that doesn't belong where it is. If you have children, get them involved, too.
- *Designate a basket or bin for the small items that tend to accumulate during the day*, such as rolls of tape, eyeglasses, small tools, or other items. These can all be put away at the same time.
- *If you have stairs in your home, keep a basket on the staircase* and fill it with the items that need to go up or down. This will save you multiple trips each day.

3. Give everything a home.

- *Place a basket or bin by the main door for outgoing items*, such as library books, videos, or gym clothes.
- *Hang hooks near the entrance to your home*. Use these for keys, coats, leashes, pocketbooks, backpacks, and anything else that is usually set down as soon as you enter your home.
- *Store things where they are primarily used*. Put your dictionary near your desk or the area where your children do their homework. Keep videos near the television. Store games where they are played rather than in a remote closet. This increases the chances that items will be put back where they belong.
- *Store like things together*. Keep all your sporting equipment in a bin in a closet or the garage. Keep cleaning supplies together in a basket or bin that can be carried from room to room.

- *Find ways to use “dead space.”* Store off-season clothes under the bed. Hang shelves in an empty hallway. Look for ways to use the space in your kitchen cabinets more efficiently. Hang shoe organizers on closet doors. Add shelves to your closet.
- *Buy containers for everything you can.* Boxes, bins, and baskets are the best way to store both items you use every day, such as DVDs and CDs, and rarely used items, such as holiday decorations. Look for see-through containers so you know what’s in each one without having to open it.
- *Maintain at least two laundry hampers, one for lights and one for darks.* This way you won’t waste time sorting clothes.

4. [Keep important information in an accessible place.](#)

- *Create a central messaging area.* Hang a white board or chalkboard where you can keep and update a master list of phone numbers that you use regularly (including emergency numbers) as well as space for notes and phone messages. Keep your family calendar here, too.
- *Build a list of contacts for home repair and maintenance, including plumbers, electricians, heating contractors, and carpenters.* Keep this in your central messaging area or in a drawer near your phone.
- *Create folders for the important documents you need to keep, such as health care records, bills, bank statements, tax information, insurance records, warranties, and other documents.* File these as soon as they come in the mail.
- *Photocopy the important items in your wallet.* Make copies of the front and back of your driver’s license, credit cards, membership cards, and the other critical items you carry each day. If your wallet is lost or stolen, the photocopies will help remind you of what must be replaced and provide the information you need to cancel credit cards.
- *Program frequently used numbers into your cell phone.* But be sure to also have a written list so you can easily enter them into a new phone. Some cell phone service providers can print a list of numbers in your phone for you.

Getting your family organized

If your family includes children, you may have different organizational challenges. The suggestions below can help.

- *Place toy bins within reach of young children.* Keep them in the area in which they actually play. If your child tends to play in the living room, a storage bin in her bedroom isn't going to do much good. Look for clear or open storage systems so your child can find what she's looking for without creating even more clutter.
- *Place coat hooks low on the wall or on the back of the door used most often by your family.* Encourage children to hang up coats and backpacks when they come in from outside. Low hooks in the bathroom and your child's bedroom also make it easier for them to put away clothes and towels.
- *Hang stuffed animals in a "hammock" in a corner of your child's room.* This will keep toys off the floor and bed while allowing your child to still enjoy them.
- *Rotate toys.* Store extra toys in a closet, basement, or attic. When your child tires of his playthings, stash those away and bring out a few items from storage. Not only will this help control clutter, it will keep your child's interest in his toys alive.
- *Keep small toys in a see-through hanging shoe bag.* These are ideal for such items as small plastic dolls and metal cars. Hang the shoe bag on a closet door or wall.
- *Make your child's closet "kid-friendly."* Hang low shelves so she can reach clothing and put it away on her own.

Organizing your child's artwork

Set aside a bin or box for artwork and papers you plan to hold on to. Store your most special keepsakes in separate, labeled plastic bins and move these to a closet or attic area. Have one box per child. Also, consider framing your children's artwork and prominently displaying these treasures in your home. Or display artwork by stringing a clothesline high on a wall and clipping pictures to it with clothespins. This way you can easily change your exhibit.

- *Use labels to make it easier for your child to put things away.* Use your computer to print picture labels to help your child remember where everything from socks to Barbies belong. Older children can read simple word labels.
- *Keep children's dishes and snacks on a low shelf in the kitchen so they can get them themselves.*
- *Designate an "in-box" in which to store school papers that need to be signed or reviewed.* Have your child put papers in the box each evening so you can find and review them before they leave for school in the morning.

Getting organized at work

Being organized at work allows you to be more productive and efficient because you'll waste less time and be better able to concentrate. Here are some tips that may help:

- *Keep your desk clear of all but current projects and the items you use on a daily basis.* A desk clear of all but a few essentials will help you feel in control of your space and make it easier to focus on the task at hand. If you have nearby shelf or cabinet space, place your plants, knickknacks, and photographs there.
- *Clean out your files, shelves, and drawers regularly.* Discard or archive anything that is outdated or unnecessary or that you haven't used in two or more years. Set up a monthly e-mail or calendar reminder to clear out your files.
- *Keep a file of frequently used numbers, log-ins, or other information you use frequently.* You can hang this list on a wall or bulletin board, keep it under a clear plastic desktop cover, or in an electronic file.
- *Keep your workplace supplied with the things you need to do your job.*

5 more ways to simplify your life

- Pack lunches and lay out clothes for the next day the night before.
- Cook double batches so you can freeze a meal for later.
- Buy in bulk to save trips to the store.
- Run errands on the way to and from work or during a break to avoid making extra trips.
- Group your errands by location to save time.

Overcoming procrastination

Procrastination is one of the biggest time-wasters, and unfortunately, most of us tend to fall into a pattern of procrastination at one time or another. Whether you're putting off starting a new project at work or cleaning out a closet, the following tips can help you overcome procrastination:

- *Set a time limit on tasks you dislike doing.* The task will seem less overwhelming if you know you will stop at a certain time. Try using a kitchen timer or the alarm on your watch to help you stay focused on a task. For example, if you need to sort through old receipts to prepare for tax time, you might decide to dedicate 15 minutes a day to the job. Setting a timer can help you get motivated and stay focused during that time period.
- *Do the things you dislike the most first.* Most of us put off the things we dread. But this just makes it hard to get anything started. Try tackling the things you like the least first. Crossing these to-dos off your list may give you the energy you need to get to the rest.
- *Build in rewards.* You may be able to motivate yourself to tackle your to-dos by giving yourself a reward for completing a task, whether it's a long bike ride or lunch out with a co-worker.

- *Make big tasks more manageable by breaking them down into smaller parts.* Procrastination is often the result of feeling overwhelmed. When faced with a big task that you keep putting off because you're not sure how to get started, break it down into smaller steps and tackle them one at a time. For example, if you need to clean out the basement, start with one box. Eventually, you'll get to the whole thing.
- *Tackle things when you have the most energy.* If you know you tend to have the most energy first thing in the morning, use that time to work on things you've been putting off.

6 Make time for yourself



Time for yourself—whether it’s to sit quietly with a cup of tea, go for a long bike ride, or take a class—isn’t a luxury. It’s a necessity. Research shows that when people make the time to do the things they love, they feel happier, more fulfilled, and more able to deal with overload, stress, and anxiety.

The first step in making time for yourself is believing that it’s important. When you believe that being the best spouse, parent, employee, friend, or relative you can be requires taking care of yourself, you can make time for you a priority without feeling guilty.

Making the most of down time

You may be able to make more time for yourself by being more efficient and making good use of down time, like your commute to work or the 15 minutes you sit in the car waiting for your child.

- Always carry reading material with you, and try to make it something that’s actually fun to read. Or, if you prefer, bring a puzzle book or a sketch pad and drawing pencils.
- Stock your car (or a portable music device if you take public transportation) with your favorite music, books on tape, or language lessons so you can actually enjoy your commute.
- Catch up on short calls. If you have 15 minutes, use it to get in touch with a relative or friend or for “business” calls, like scheduling a babysitter or making a reservation.
- Make lists. In 10 minutes you could organize your to-do list, make a grocery list, or plan out a week’s worth of dinners.

How to make time for yourself

If you're so overloaded that taking time for yourself has dropped to the very bottom of your list, you may need to work "you time" back into your schedule. The following tips can help:

- *Start by thinking about what makes you happy.* Come up with a list of what makes you feel good. Your list might include activities like gardening, working on a car, jogging, or going to the movies. Or you might wish you had time for less active pursuits, like reading a book, doing a crossword puzzle, or taking a long bath. Then focus on ways to fit these activities into your daily routine. Remember, you don't have to make a huge change right away. Start by committing to doing just one of the things on your list on a weekly basis.
- *Treat time for you like the priority it is.* Remember that taking time for yourself is important because it's necessary for feeling good and being able to tackle everything else you have going on in your life.
- *Schedule it.* Build time for yourself right into your schedule. Sign up for a class or block off a weekend afternoon. Schedule time for yourself just as you would any other appointment. Also, make a conscious effort to not schedule anything during one night a week. If you are in the habit of staying late at work, choose one or two days of the week and commit to leaving at a certain time. You can set your e-mail to send you a reminder that it's time to go home or ask a co-worker to stop by your work area so you can leave together.
- *Remember the importance of unstructured downtime.* In addition to making room for favorite activities in your schedule, try to make time—even if it's just five or 10 minutes here and there—to simply do nothing. A few minutes of unstructured time can help you feel less chaotic and overscheduled during the rest of the day.
- *Communicate your needs to your family.* Talk with your spouse or partner about how you can both find time for yourselves. If you have children, perhaps you could alternate nights off with each other so you each have time to yourself for something else. Talk with your children about how important it is to have some time alone and let them know in advance when you'll be taking some "alone time."

- *Reduce your outside commitments.* If you're having trouble making time for yourself, something may have to go. Take a look at your commitments and see what you can eliminate. Can you resign from a community board or group that you don't find fulfilling anymore? Say "no" to an invitation that you're not excited about?
- *Grab a moment whenever you can.* Remember that taking time for yourself doesn't always have to mean planning a lunch out with a friend or taking the afternoon off to lose yourself in a novel. Try waking up 15 minutes earlier and spending them sitting quietly with a cup of coffee.
- *Take a vacation day for yourself.* Sometimes, the only way to break the cycle of overload is to take a day for yourself. If you have vacation time available and are able to work it out with your manager ahead of time, consider taking a "personal day" from work. And don't use it just to catch up on errands and to-dos. Spend your day taking care of yourself.
- *Use your weekends wisely.* If your weekends feel like a marathon of errands, sports practices, or family gatherings, cut back. Try to focus on using your weekends to relax and recharge for the coming work-week. If driving your children to weekend events is overwhelming, carpool with other families so you can get a break.
- *Remember that things can wait.* If you feel guilty about taking time to curl up with a good book or relaxing with a cup of coffee when there's laundry waiting, bills to pay, or other chores to do, try to change your mindset. Tell yourself that those things can wait until tomorrow, but today you're going to do something that is good for you.

7 Connect with friends and family



Feeling connected to your family and friends is probably something you take for granted. But you may underestimate how important that connection is. Research shows that people who have strong connections with others tend to feel happier and more secure and are actually healthier. But when we're overloaded, we tend to neglect our relationships. Below you'll find tips for building and maintaining strong relationships with friends and family.

- *Carve out uninterrupted family time.* Dedicate at least one evening a week to family time so you can reconnect with each other. Turn off the television and let the phone ring. Order pizza, play a game, or hold a family meeting. If your evenings are too hectic, try a weekend morning or afternoon. Go out for breakfast or for a long walk together.
- *Build couple time into your schedule, too.* The often-cited advice to establish a weekly date night may not be possible for many busy working couples. But there are still ways you can find special time for each other. Make it a habit to share a cup of coffee together each morning before work or before the kids get up. Or turn off the television in the evening so you can spend a few minutes talking about your day and what's going on with each other. Many couples also find that taking care of the "business" of family life by e-mail or phone during the day frees them up to focus on each other in the evenings.
- *Work to maintain friendships.* Friendships are crucial for emotional well-being. But when you're overloaded, arranging a date with a friend or catching up on the phone may feel like too much effort. Try scheduling standing dates with friends. When you know that you will get together the first Monday of every month, you'll be less likely to skip getting together with friends and you'll have something to look forward to. Also, try new ways of spending time with your friends. If going out to dinner doesn't fit into your schedule, try doing something together that you'd do anyway, such as going for a run, watching a game at home, or even grocery shopping.

- *Reach out to others.* Give others help and support even when they aren't asking for it. Reach out to people in need. Be welcoming and warm to the people you meet. You never know who may end up being a friend.
- *Build an extended "family" of friends you can count on.* If you don't live near your family, it's even more important to build and maintain friendships. Try to create a support network of friends you can open up to and rely on during a difficult time. If you'd like to make new friends, sign up for a class that interests you or look for ways to get involved in your community.
- *Share a hobby or interest with a family member or friend.* One of the best ways to feel connected with people is to share an activity that you both love. Whether it's baking cookies with your neighbor, shooting hoops with a friend from work, or hiking with your husband, sharing hobbies or interests can help you feel closer to the people in your life. If you don't already share an interest, try out a few things until you find something you both enjoy. Look into an adult education or community college class that you can take together.
- *Stay connected with loved ones who live far away.* It's hard to maintain close relationships when you don't see people every day. And for many people, finding time to talk on the phone is difficult. If you have friends or family who live far away, look for more creative ways to stay in touch. E-mail and text messaging are simple and quick. But you could also start a virtual book club by sending books or articles you've enjoyed back and forth or exchange post cards instead of long letters.

Staying connected with friends and family can sometimes feel like work, especially when you're already overloaded. But those relationships are what help you feel less stressed and happier during difficult times, so it's important to make them a priority.

8 Manage information overload



Technology helps us work better and faster. The Internet, e-mail, cell phones, and other electronic devices help us access important information and stay in touch. But technology does have its drawbacks, the most common of which is information overload. We have too much information all at once, which can cause us to feel anxious, lose focus, and even make mistakes. It's important to learn how to manage information technology rather than let it manage you.

The following tips can help you deal with information overload at work and at home:

- *Stick to your priorities.* This is especially important at work, when it can seem like every incoming e-mail or request from a co-worker is truly urgent. Use the tips in chapter 3 (page 16) to set priorities and stick to them each day so you won't be distracted by less important things.
- *Minimize distractions.* Whether it's a ringing phone during your family dinner, the sound of your e-mail program alerting you to a new message, or a co-worker who wants to chat, distractions keep you from focusing on what's important. Here are some ways to minimize distractions:
 - Set your phone to voice mail and close your e-mail program when you need to work on a particular project so you're not tempted to answer every single call or message.
 - Communicate your need for undisturbed time to co-workers and family members. Smile and politely tell people that you are in the middle of something important and can't talk but you will get back to them later.
 - Bring your work to a secluded spot when you really need to concentrate. If necessary, hang up a "do not disturb" sign.
 - Protect your time. When you need to concentrate on the task at hand, set your e-mail and voice mail out-of-office alerts, block out time in your calendar, and turn off your cell phone.

- *Disconnect every day.* Make sure that there is a period of time—even if it’s just 20 minutes—when you disconnect from every technological device you own, including the phone and television. Use this time to sit quietly, read, take a walk, or talk with your partner or family.
- *Reduce the amount of incoming information.* Cancel subscriptions to e-mail newsletters, magazines, and newspapers you don’t read. Avoid giving your e-mail, mailing address, or phone number to retailers who may contact you, or set up a separate e-mail account for these kinds of transactions. Recycle old files, magazines, journals, and other sources of information you’ll never get to or no longer need. Remember to shred any documents that contain personal information.
- *Organize your computer.* A well-organized work and home computer is worth the effort. “File” documents in easy-to-recognize folders. Burn important information and photos onto discs for storage. If you have a lot of digital pictures, purchase or download a software program that will help you keep them organized. Don’t forget to back up the files on your home computer regularly.

Effective Internet search techniques

The Internet can be an incredible source of information, but if you don’t know how to find accurate, reliable information, searches can leave you feeling overwhelmed. Here are some tips that can help:

- Try out a few search engines, such as Google, AltaVista, or Lycos, to see which one you prefer.
- Look for a “tips for searches” or “help” section on the homepage of each search engine. This will tell you how to get the best results.
- Be as specific as possible. If you are searching for information about a vacation destination and enter “resorts” into a search engine, you’ll have to wade through millions of results. However, if you enter “all-inclusive resorts Cancun, Mexico,” the results will be much more manageable.
- Bookmark sites you visit frequently so you don’t waste any time looking for them.

Finally, make sure vacations truly are vacations. Research shows that people who take yearly vacations are less stressed and even have a lower risk of dying from heart disease. But if you bring work with you on vacation, you'll be missing out on many of the benefits of vacation. A recent study by the Families and Work Institute found that people who work on vacation return to their jobs stressed and overwhelmed. So leave your laptop and cell phone behind when you go on vacation so you can recharge your batteries and return feeling energized and refreshed.

Returning to work from vacation

Many employees spend their whole vacations worrying about the pile of work that they'll face when they return. The best way to avoid overload when you return from vacation is to make preparations before you leave. Here are some tips that can help:

- Designate a backup person.
- Make a plan for handling special projects or tasks while you are gone.
- Make sure co-workers and clients know that you will be unavailable.
- Schedule your return for a day or two before you have to go back to work so you have time to adjust to being home.

Getting control of your e-mail

E-mail overload is a common condition in the modern workplace. If you feel as if you are always playing catch-up with e-mail, the following tips may help:

- *Check e-mail at selected times of the day.* Turn off your e-mail alerts so you aren't tempted to read and respond to messages as they come in. Instead, check your e-mail at designated times during the day. Many people find that checking e-mail in the morning, afternoon, and before they leave work is sufficient.
- *Make your e-mail program work for you.* Learn to set up your e-mail system so it automatically delivers incoming messages on specific topics to pre-designated folders and eliminates spam. Then you can check the relevant folders at your convenience. You may also be able to use color coding or special alerts to help you organize your mail and see urgent messages right away.
- *Use the triage system of responding to e-mail.* When you are scanning your inbox, separate e-mails into three categories or folders: those that require an immediate response, those that can wait a day, and those that don't require any response at all. This way you'll respond to urgent messages quickly without spending time on less important e-mails.
- *Separate work and personal communications.* Set up a Web account for personal e-mail and ask friends and family to avoid sending you messages at work. This will reduce interruptions during your workday and may also bring you in line with your organization's policies regarding personal e-mail.
- *Don't contribute to e-mail overload.* Before you send a message, ask yourself, "Is this the best way to resolve this issue or communicate this information?" You may find that a phone call or even walking over to a colleague's desk is more effective. Also, avoid passing on jokes, urban legends, and other mass e-mails. These just clog up other people's inboxes and may even be prohibited by your organization.

9 Be healthy



Taking care of yourself is crucial for overcoming overload. If you're not feeling good both physically and emotionally, overload can easily turn into anxiety, burnout, and even depression. Read on for tips and information on getting healthy, changing habits that can lead to overload, and getting help when you need it.

The basics

You know the three main ways to stay healthy and feel good: exercise, sleep, and a healthy diet. But when you're overloaded, it's hard to manage even these basic steps. Here are some tips that can help you make healthy changes to your lifestyle step by step:

Exercise

- *Walk wherever you can whenever you can.* Take the stairs at work. Park as far away from the front door as possible at the mall or other stores. Take a walk during your lunch break. Walk up and down the sidelines at your child's sporting events. Meet friends for a walk instead of going out to eat.
- *Exercise while you're watching television.* Get down on the floor and do sit-ups, stretches, and other exercises while you watch.
- *Make exercise a group activity.* Go for a walk with your partner after dinner. Ride bikes with your child. Go for hikes with friends on the weekends. Plan active vacations.

Sleep

- *Make sure your bedroom is conducive to sleep.* Block out any disturbing light, make your bed comfortable, and avoid bringing work to bed with you.
- *Cut back on the amount of TV you watch.* If you're in the habit of watching television every night, turn it off and go to bed earlier than usual. Even 15 minutes more sleep can make a difference in how you feel.
- *Get up at the same time on the weekends as you do during the weekdays.* This helps regulate your body's internal clock.

- *Try to go to sleep earlier than usual when you are feeling overloaded.* Getting a good night's sleep will give you more energy and help you manage stress.

Diet

- *Plan a healthy week's menu, including snacks, and use your menu to make a shopping list.* This way you'll have good food on hand and won't be tempted to order takeout or munch on unhealthy snacks.
- *Pre-package healthy snacks and keep them in a handy spot.* Fill baggies with whole-grain crackers and low-fat cheese, cut-up vegetables, popcorn, fruit, and other healthy snacks. Grab these when you need a snack or you're running out the door. These pre-portioned snacks will keep you from overeating.
- *Stock your work area and your car with healthy snacks.* Keep microwave popcorn, soups, nuts, dried fruit, whole-grain crackers, and other healthy snacks at hand at work. Stash whole-grain crackers, dried fruit, nuts, and bottles of water in your car so you're not tempted by drive-through restaurants.
- *Shop the outer edges of the grocery store.* Most stores keep the healthier, fresh foods on the outer aisles and the less healthy processed foods in the inner aisles.

Getting help

Sometimes we need help to make even small changes. If you want to take steps to overcome overload by getting healthy and feeling good but you're not sure how to start, there are many people who can help.

- *Your employee assistance program (EAP) or work-life program.* The EAP or work-life program offered by your employer may be able to provide you with information and resources to help you feel less overloaded and more in control of your life.

- *Your health care provider.* Your doctor can help you understand what changes you need to make to be healthier and feel more resilient, such as quitting smoking or getting more exercise to increase your energy. Your health care provider may also be able to refer you to other helpful professionals or resources, such as a nutritionist or a support group.
- *A therapist or counselor.* A therapist or counselor can help you understand and work on issues, such as anxiety and stress, that may lead to or result from feelings of overload. A therapist can also help you deal with other issues, such as relationship problems or depression, that might be keeping you from making positive changes in your life.
- *Friends and family.* Friends and family can give you a sense of perspective. They can help you remember what's meaningful in your life. They can be there to just listen when you're feeling down. But friends and family can also offer practical help. For example, you could trade babysitting with a friend or neighbor so you and your partner can get some time alone. If you have a friend who's good with computers, offer to cook him dinner if he'll help you clean up your computer and make backups of important documents. If another friend is very organized, ask her to give you some organizing tips in exchange for a service you're good at, like painting a room or yard work.

Asking for help

Many people are reluctant to ask for help. They may feel they'll become a burden or that they don't want to admit they need help. But asking for help is an important part of building a support network you can count on. If you find it hard to ask people for help, start out small. Ask a friend or neighbor to pick up your child from school. Ask a co-worker to give you feedback on a project you're working on. Be sure to thank the person for his or her help and then return the favor when you get an opportunity.

10 Practice being resilient



What is resilience?

“Resilience is about being adaptable. It’s about being flexible. It’s about recognizing that we’ve got strengths that perhaps we never knew we had until we have to use them. And it’s like many things in life—the more we practice, the more we learn. The more we find out about resilience, and certainly the more we do of it, then the more resilient we become.”

—Dr. Stephen Williams, resilience expert and organizational psychologist

Resilient people are able to adapt to overload, stress, trauma, and tragedy. They find ways to bounce back from the ups and downs of life and move forward. Some people are born with a strong sense of resilience. Others need to learn and practice resilience. If you would like to become more resilient, the tips and information in this chapter can help. Remember that resilience is a skill, like riding a bike. The more you practice, the better you’ll be.

Ways to become more resilient

Resilience isn’t about “toughing it out” or reacting to every setback with a smile. Resilient people still feel sad, angry, or frustrated when faced with a setback. But they find ways to move forward, to tackle challenges with creativity, hope, and a positive attitude.

Here are some ways to practice resilience:

- *Maintain a sense of perspective.* Ask yourself, “How big is this problem really?” and “What do I need to do?” When you feel as if everything has gone wrong or you’re faced with a crushing setback, remind yourself of the good in your life and that things really will change.
- *Recognize that you have a choice in how you handle challenges.* You can’t control what happens to you, but you can choose how you respond. You can choose to react to changes and problems with hope and a positive attitude.
- *Accept change.* Change and uncertainty are part of life. When you accept this, you’ll be better able to react to change with flexibility.

- *Anticipate challenges* by focusing on the positive ways in which you can meet them rather than possible negative outcomes. This will help you feel more in control and less overwhelmed.
- *Learn how to calm yourself.* When you feel yourself reacting to a challenge with escalating stress and anxiety, take steps to calm yourself. Look back to the tips in chapter 2 (page 7) for some ideas that can help.
- *Overcome your fear.* All of us feel fear, especially when we're faced with a change. But fear can hold us back from new experiences and opportunities for growth. If you are faced with a challenge that feels scary or overwhelming, start with the simplest thing you can do that takes you in the direction you want to go. Ask yourself, "What's the smallest thing I can do to get started?" Once you've thought about it, do it.
- *Let go of your anger.* A difficult challenge can cause us to feel angry and upset. These feelings are normal, but they won't help us move forward. Work through your anger and try to let go of negative feelings by writing about them or talking with a trusted friend.
- *Take action.* Avoid dwelling on problems. Focus on solutions instead. Figure out what you can do and then do it, one step at a time.
- *Laugh.* Even when things seem to be falling apart around you, try to find time to smile and laugh. It's very healing and it will help you forget your worries for a few moments. Rent a movie that makes you laugh or spend time with a friend with a good sense of humor.
- *Focus on the things that are good in your life.* Count your blessings. Try to appreciate the day-to-day good things. The more time you spend doing that, the more energy you will have to deal with the problems that you face.

Be your own coach.

Remind yourself that you will get through your difficult times and grow stronger as a result. Tell yourself, "I can handle this and I will handle this."

The tips and information in this booklet are designed to help you gain a sense of control over your life and your time. As you read these ideas and begin to put them into practice, remember the power of even small changes. You don't have to completely overhaul your life to overcome overload. Start with a few small changes, then add more as you begin to feel more in control and less overwhelmed.

Use the space below to list the three steps you'd like to take first.

3 small steps

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

We'd like to hear any suggestions or ideas you have on this topic. Please write to us at publications@ceridian.com. Be sure to include the title of the booklet in your message.

Thank you.

