

Addicted To Being Busy? How to Overcome Chronic Overwhelm



Have you ever had the experience of finally getting a day off, only to find yourself itching to check your work email or chip away at a project? You say you're going to relax but then it starts to dawn on you that you actually have no idea what that even looks like for you. Or maybe you're scared that if you were to do less, others might notice and think poorly of you.

For many women juggling a lot in their personal and professional lives, being busy isn't just a habit—it becomes an identity, whether they're conscious of it or not. The endless to-do lists, packed calendar and pressure to do and achieve can all get wrapped up in feelings of self-worth. So what do you do when the weight becomes too much and threatens to erode your focus, well-being, and even relationships?

Read on for expert tips on spotting the signs and making intentional shifts to reclaim your energy, focus and sense of balance.

Addicted to being busy?

Behavioral strategist and Founder and Chief Behavior Strategist of Break Method Bizzie Gold is the author of the forthcoming *Your Brain is a Filthy A Liar*. She shares, "Overwhelm occurs when you know you've overstacked your plate and can't think of a strategic way to dig yourself out. Some of us get there willfully, ignoring all the obvious signs along the way, while others land there through a perfect storm—when life throws too many lemons at once. Overwhelm impacts both work and personal life by pulling attention and focus away from the present moment. When the backlogged list of to-dos becomes too long and the path to success fades, people lose their ability to focus."

Some of us may be more prone to chronic overwhelm than others, she adds. "Certain brain pattern types don't just survive in high-stress environments—they thrive. Their schedules stay packed, not because they became addicted to busyness as adults, but because staying overloaded became an adaptive response in early childhood. When life gets hard? Work harder. Relationship falling apart? Build something new. The worse life gets, the more these types double down on their careers, generating their most innovative and profitable ideas under pressure."

Courtney Carver, author of *Gentle: Rest More, Stress, Less, And Live The Life You Actually Want*, points out that sometimes apathy can stem from chronic overwhelm. "We get numb to how we feel and what we need because we're so up caught in a cycle where we don't know what we feel, what we need or what is next."

Signs of chronic overwhelm

Gold says, “Eventually, the body starts waving the white flag—chronic illness, autoimmune symptoms or full-scale burnout. Relationships suffer too. These types don’t just overcommit; they create a ripple effect of frustration—showing up late, canceling at the last minute, making others feel like they’re always second place to something more important. And when relationships hit turbulence, they don’t break down or lash out—they go cold. Stoic. Unaffected. Not because they don’t care, but because they’ve numbed themselves with work, burying emotions under another project, another deadline, another distraction. To everyone else, it looks like calculation. In reality, it’s just avoidance in its highest-functioning form.”

Another signs that you might be chronically overwhelmed, says Carver, is finding it hard to pay attention to things. “Maybe you’re reaching more on your phone and don’t even notice what you’re taking in. You’re looking for some kind of outlet or relief so you’re going to the easy stuff like scrolling more frequently.”

Sometimes you catch yourself before it becomes too big of an issue, she explains, but “sometimes it’s such a slow build, you don’t even know you’re there. You feel used to it until all of a sudden you’re too far gone and need to take some bigger steps to address it.”

Embrace mini resets

If quitting your job or throwing your phone in the ocean just isn’t an option when you realize you’re chronically overwhelmed, there’s still hope. Carver encourages taking what she calls “mini resets.”

“The first thing we have to do,” she says, “is remind ourselves that we don’t have to overhaul our entire lives to experience relief from overwhelm. Instead, if we can schedule small blocks of time to rest or do these mini resets even once a week it can be helpful.”

A few things she recommends:

- Make a more reasonable to-do list or switch from a daily to a weekly to-do list
- Take a look at your calendar and note where you’re overcommitted, need to cut back or move some things around
- Bring awareness to your digital habits. If you’re scrolling or looking at your phone too much or working at your computer too much, make a plan to decrease the amount
- If work days stretch into personal time on the regular, be more disciplined about stopping work at a reasonable hour.
- Declutter spaces you spend a lot of time in to decrease feelings of “noise” in your mind
- Create a meal plan for a few days and double it to simplify cooking and eating to fuel your brain and body
- Reach out to friends, colleagues and contacts instead of putting it off
- Take a short rest by lying down, reading a book, or taking a walk

Experiment with doing less

Start by recognizing why you’re doing too much, says Carver. Are you trying to prove your worth by how busy you are or how much you can accomplish? Are you afraid or being punished for asking for what you need?



She suggests looking at where you could pull back so you have a little bit more time and energy for yourself. “Just because we can do it all doesn’t mean we should do it all,” she says. If chronic overwhelm is coming up for you in your work life, “look at what your actual job description is. All of that extra stuff, you’re likely not getting paid for, and you don’t have to do it. I think it’s becoming more common to have this fear that we’re not measuring up, so the way we try to measure up is just by doing more things. It doesn’t result in more money. It might result in more praise and more work, but it just makes us exhausted. Don’t assume that how it is is how it always has to be.”

Ashley Neese, author of *Permission to Rest*, recommends, “Start by pausing before saying yes—create space to feel into what truly aligns with your energy. Simplify your to-do list, trust in spaciousness, and notice how your nervous system responds when you allow yourself to do less but with more presence.”

One simple but powerful habit shift, Gold echoes, “is replacing the reflexive ‘yes’ with ‘Let me check my calendar.’” This helps prevent over-commitment before it starts. She also recommends blocking out time for self-care and downtime. “Overwhelm doesn’t just drain energy; it erodes presence and productivity across the board. Treating self-care with the same level of importance as a business meeting isn’t a luxury—it’s the difference between staying on track and watching the wheels fall off when you least expect it.”

Gold also recommends that busy entrepreneurs and workaholics invest in an executive assistant to help with time management. A virtual assistant to help with tasks that eat up valuable hours and brain power can also be a total game-changer.

Cultivating quiet and self-compassion

When cultivating quiet in your life, Neese suggests, “Begin by anchoring into your breath—slow, steady inhales and exhales create an internal refuge. Set small pockets of intentional silence throughout your day, step outside to connect with nature, and soften your focus to invite more spaciousness within. Embrace intentional rest by carving out moments to simply be—lie down without distractions, close your eyes, and let your body fully exhale. Trust that rest is not a luxury but a vital practice that allows you to listen deeply and replenish from within.”

You can start to speak to yourself more gently as well, says Neese. “Speak to yourself the way you would a dear friend—gently, with patience and understanding. When overwhelm arises, place a hand on your heart, take a deep breath and remind yourself that slowing down is not failure but an act of deep care. Give yourself permission to move at your own pace—release the pressure to “get it right” and honor the ebb and flow of your energy. Each small step toward ease is enough.”

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