

6 Strategies for When You Feel Overwhelmed at Work or With Life

By Alice Boyes, "Psychology Today"

1. Finish something you started but didn't complete.

If I'm feeling really exhausted, I'll look for something I can complete in 15 minutes.

How this helps: It will give you a feeling of being in control.

2. Give your mind a chance to wander.

Sometimes, to re-charge your creativity, you need to give your mind a chance to wander and free-associate. When you do this, problems that seemed difficult can instantly become clearer. I like this strategy when I'm having trouble figuring out what should truly be my highest priority or when I'm overcomplicating solutions to problems.

How this helps: It makes it easier to see the big picture and the easiest path forward, whereas continuing to bang away thinking about issues often doesn't achieve that.

3. Do some work-related continuing education.

Sometimes, we need to refill our mental and emotional tanks rather than keep producing output. If I'm feeling a bit scattered, I often like to do some work-related reading.

How this helps: It can help you feel like your mental ATM is getting deposits as well as withdrawals.

4. Make a brief list of what you're *not* going to work on.

When you have a lot of ideas, it's easy to feel guilty and anxious that you're not working on all of them. Sometimes, you need to explicitly make a list of all the projects you're not going to start or work on while you're concentrating on your current highest priority.

How this helps: It makes it easier to focus and relieves guilt.

5. Do whatever is important but anxiety-provoking, then allow yourself to take a break.

It's easy to say that we should all work smarter rather than harder. Sometimes, to break a cycle of non-smart overworking, you need to do one thing that feels very hard and then let yourself take a break.

Tip: Sometimes, just getting the ball rolling on an anxiety-provoking task is enough to help you feel less overwhelmed. You don't necessarily need to complete the task. You can always do the first step and leave it at that for today.

How this helps: It gets you into the mode of working smarter rather than harder and relieves nagging anxiety about tasks you haven't done.

6. Do the minimum necessary to get a task done.

There are all sorts of occasions where I make tasks more complicated or difficult than they need to be. For example, I'll sit down to write an article and attempt to hit ten points when actually five points—or even three—is fine.

One of the biggest self-sabotaging thinking habits for anxious perfectionists is over-complicating solutions to problems. You imagine that what's necessary to move forward is something more complicated or difficult than what it is in reality. Look for the simplest solution and take that road.