

# How to Beat Hurry Sickness

## Overcoming Constant Panic and Rush

"I'm too busy to read this!" you say.

Now, don't worry, it won't take up much of your time. Five minutes, or maybe three if you skim. "But I can't," you say. "I'm running late for a meeting."

So you rush off, half-walking, half-running, and grab a seat in the meeting room. A few minutes later you realize that you're double-booked, so you make your apologies and dash off to join a conference call. Your day ahead looks just as hectic so, while you're on the phone, you reply to emails marked "urgent," check your calendar, and reply to several instant messages.

There's no let-up even after you arrive home. You somehow juggle cooking a meal, putting the kids to bed, and doing some housework with preparing for a presentation that you're giving in the morning.

And you do it all again tomorrow.

Does this frantic sense of being always "on the go" seem familiar? If so, you might be suffering from hurry sickness.

In this article, we look at what hurry sickness is, what its consequences are, and how to avoid it.

## What Is Hurry Sickness?

Cardiologists [Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman](#) coined the term "hurry sickness" after noticing that many of their patients suffered from

a "harrying sense of time urgency." They defined hurry sickness as "a continuous struggle and unremitting attempt to accomplish or achieve more and more things or participate in more and more events in less and less time."

People with hurry sickness think fast, talk fast, and act fast. They multitask and rush against the clock, feeling pressured to get things done and getting flustered by any sign of a problem. They're everywhere, too. Professor Richard Jolly of the London Business School [recently found](#) that 95 percent of the managers he studied suffer from the condition.

## What Causes Hurry Sickness?

You'll never find a hurry-sick person with an empty diary. Hurry-sick people are conscientious and work hard, but they struggle to acknowledge the limits of what they can take on. Consequently, they habitually commit to more than they have time for.

Also, our 24/7 state of connectedness means that we increasingly suffer from FOMO – fear of missing out – so we're reluctant to disconnect and slow down. We fret that a deal might fall through if we don't reply to an enquiry quickly. We worry about how it might look to take time off or to say no to a task. This need to stay available means that hurry-sick people remain constantly "switched on."

Once we've begun this cycle of panic, it's easy to get used to it, and even to accept it, even though it damages us.

## What Are the Consequences of Hurry Sickness?

Being busy is usually seen as a virtue but when busyness tips over into hurry sickness, the consequences can be severe. You lose the

ability to stop and think, and you become less effective. Errors creep into your work, you lose sight of the "big picture," and the quality of your work starts to fall.

Hurry sickness increases your body's output of the [stress](#) hormone cortisol, which can cause long-term health problems, such as depression. It can affect your personal relationships, too. "Go-fast" working habits travel home with you, and they can make it difficult to give your best to friends and family. Your mind stays locked in a state of overstimulation, making you tired, anxious and prone to irritability, but unable to relax.

## How to Overcome Hurry Sickness

Although it can be difficult to find a way out of the chaos of hurry sickness, it is possible. Make it your goal to work smarter – not harder – by finding strategies that will create lasting change.

Let's look at three sets of strategies that you can combine to overcome hurry sickness. Some are just common sense, but they're easy to overlook when you're living in a state of constant rush.

### Action-Oriented Strategies

These approaches are useful when you are free to take action to change the situation.

- **Question why you're being asked to do something.** If someone told you to jump, what would you say? "How high?" or "Why?" Your hurry sickness might be due to saying yes to people's requests too often, and taking on too much. It's important to question the rationale behind the demands made of you, so you can politely say no to tasks that fall outside your job description, which other people are better qualified to do, or which

you don't have time for. You'll then have space to do a better job on the things that really matter.

- **Be more assertive if your hurriedness is caused by other people not doing their jobs properly.** Learn how to give [clear feedback](#) , and to avoid taking on tasks that should be [delegated](#) to others.
- **Stop multitasking.** The danger of [juggling multiple tasks](#) is that you spread yourself too thinly. Either you won't work to the best of your ability, or you won't ever complete anything. Calmly [focus](#) on one thing at a time. You'll do a better job and be in less of a rush.
- **Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize.** [Prioritization](#) is a crucial survival skill for getting through pressured times. It brings order to chaos, creates calmness and space, and reduces stress. Plan an order of work. Focus on the essential and set aside – or quietly drop – the trivial. [Eisenhower's Urgent/Important Principle](#) is a great tool to use to do this.
- **Improve your time management.** There are only ever 24 hours in a day. Good [time management](#) allows you to put them to the smartest possible use by [getting more done in less time](#) . Switch your focus from activities to results, from hurriedness to effectiveness, and give dedicated, uninterrupted time to the tasks that matter. You can then target your attention where it's most needed.

## Acceptance-Oriented Strategies

These approaches apply when you have **no** power to change the situation.

- **Slow down.** Working flat out and struggling to [relax](#) isn't good for you or your work. We all need time to stop and think, to regain our perspective, and take stock of our tasks.

Simply taking regular breaks, even just to "stretch your legs," can help you to slow down and collect your thoughts. [Toffler's Stability Zones](#) can calm your pace, and [relaxation techniques](#) and [meditation](#) are useful practical tools for finding peace amid chaos.

Accepting only light projects for a while can also help you to "depressurize" and to take things more easily. When the time comes to increase your workload again, you'll be in a better position to deal with it effectively and calmly.

- **Stop.** We mean it. Set your out-of-office notifications, ditch the laptop, and [take a vacation](#) . And if you're an active type rather than a beach dweller, don't cram too much into your itinerary! Switching off can be tough when you're used to being "on the go," but the benefits of doing so can be immense. A week or two of fun and relaxation will reduce your anxiety and allow you to reassess your priorities.
- **Seek support from your manager, colleagues and family.** Working with a strong support base and [finding allies](#) within it is a great way to share concerns and responsibilities, and to stop "busyness" becoming "hurriedness."

## Emotionally Oriented Strategies

This category of approaches is useful when the stress you're experiencing comes more from the way that you perceive a situation than the situation itself.

- **Stay positive.** It's easy to get into a cycle of negative thinking when you're overloaded and rushing. Working with a [positive outlook](#) can help you to feel equal to the challenges that face you, and motivated to tackle them.

Set realistic expectations, and try using [affirmations](#) , [cognitive restructuring](#) , and [success programming](#) to boost your positivity.

- **Manage your self-control.** Our emotions run high when we're working against the clock, so managing them is important. Our articles on [managing your anger](#) , [showing patience](#) , and using [emotional intelligence](#) can help.

### Tip:

If you notice that members of your team have a permanent sense of urgency and anxiety, introduce them to the concept of hurry sickness and alert them to the harm it can do to their health, their relationships, and their career. Be supportive, and monitor their workload carefully. You can walk them through the strategies in this article so that they can select those that will help them the most.

### Key Points

Hurry sickness is a mixture of anxiety and continual feelings of urgency. Its symptoms include high stress levels, declining quality of work, tiredness, and eventually serious health problems.

To avoid hurry sickness:

- Be assertive when deciding which tasks to take on.
- Avoid multitasking.
- Prioritize your workload.
- Work on your time management.
- Slow down or even stop for a while.
- Build a network of support for yourself.
- Keep a positive outlook.