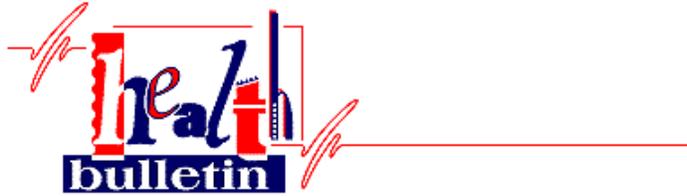


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Time Management for Teens

At the beginning of school last year, 16-year-old Hannah was invited to participate in several school activities. "I knew I didn't have time to do them all," she says, "so I chose the ones I knew I would really enjoy." Hannah practices a smart strategy for success in high school—she's in control of her time.

Homework. Band practice. Chores. School projects. Track team. Part-time job. Friends. Dating. Throw in the SATs or a state proficiency test, and the result can be major stress. Practically every teen has been stressed out with too much to do and too little time to do it in. One of the problems, as Hannah found, is that so many activities compete for one's time. Teens who manage their time well have their personal favorite tips that work best for them, but all agree on one important strategy: Set priorities.

For Hannah and Zane, 16, school is number one. "If I have a test coming up," Zane explains, "I'll turn down an invitation from a friend—schoolwork before fun." Hannah agrees. Like many teens, she doesn't like the feeling of having an unfinished project hanging over her; it's a major stressor. "Say I have a big project due in two days," she says. "I would do the project first, then I can enjoy the time I spend with my friends." Hannah also starts right away on her assignments. Zane tries to break down projects into small pieces and not tackle them all at once.

Not so with 15-year-old Andy. School is a priority for him, also, but his style is a little different: "Most times I wait to finish things. I won't put them off, but I don't rush to do them. This seems to work well for me, though I know most people have a hard time doing that. And I make sure assignments are completed on time and thoroughly." Andy reports that this tactic works well for him; he's rarely overwhelmed or stressed out by upcoming assignments. He plans out beforehand what he needs to complete, and he's able to fit in a large class load, play piano and bass in a band, and spend at least one night a weekend with friends.

The difference in these teens' styles points out the importance of developing time management skills that work for the individual; one size doesn't fit all. For example, one conventional time management tip is to write down everything in a master planner. But Hannah has found that keeping different calendars for different purposes works best for her. She has one calendar for school, one for soccer practice, and another for dance, birthdays, student council meetings, and so on. Andy writes down homework assignments in a school planner, but says, "Most things I don't need to write down because I have a good memory." Teens should experiment with different strategies until they find what works for them.

Most teens do find that keeping some form of written schedule is helpful. Activities that come at fixed hours and cannot be changed should be listed first. Classes, activities with fixed time periods, work, and sleep fall into this category. Teens have more flexibility in determining when to complete homework assignments, exams, and papers.

Sleep is one area in which teens shortchange themselves. They need at least nine hours of sleep each night, but a recent study at Brown University School of Medicine found that teens averaged just 7.3 hours a night. The researchers also noted that students who had mostly A's on their report cards averaged more sleep than those who received D's and F's. Inadequate sleep also can cause or aggravate stress. Getting enough sleep isn't always a matter of merely scheduling sleep time—it's also budgeting enough time to finish assignments. Some teens stay up late to finish assignments because they misjudge how much time they take. A rule of thumb is to estimate how much time one thinks an assignment will take, then tack on another 25%.

Teens need to realize that time management strategies such as these won't magically allow them to squeeze in everything they want to do. They must make choices on how to spend their time—back to priorities again. "It's hard to say no," says Hannah, "but you have to if you want to manage your time. It's better to be fully involved, for example, do your share for the club or group, than to just show up and not be prepared or do nothing. Make sure you have the time to contribute. It's better to do well in fewer activities." She advises time-stressed teens to drop some activities if they're feeling it's too much.

Some people find the idea of managing their time restrictive. "I don't want to turn into an efficiency robot," they protest. But managing time doesn't mean being controlled by a schedule; it means having control. What it *doesn't* mean is over-scheduling. Rigorous schedules with every minute planned are doomed to fail. In fact, lack of flexibility is the major reason that students give up on schedules. Unexpected events happen, things take longer than anticipated, and new obligations continually pop up. As Zane advises, "Don't schedule yourself too tightly." Leaving some time open to move activities around and for recreational and "down" time is crucial.

Good time management skills are a proven buffer against academic stress and can help teens lead a more balanced life. Like any skills, people are not born with them. They have to practice. Encourage teens not to give up if they find themselves stressed out despite their efforts to manage their time. The key is to keep trying and, as Andy says, "Try not to worry too much about it. The more you worry, the harder things will be."

Activity: Time management skills often can help people reach their goals. Suppose a student wants to raise his or her grade in math. The student might schedule a set time each day for study or tutoring, rather than just saying, "I'll study harder." Have students choose a goal that they have had difficulty reaching. Help them to experiment with writing objectives for their goal in terms of managing their time for it. Each objective should be specific, measurable, realistic, and have a completion date.

The Bulletin Board

Try these tips for managing your time, and share your favorite time management tips with your classmates. When you're in control of your time, you reduce your stress level.

Ten Top Tips for Schoolwork

1. Budget enough time. For each project you undertake, calculate how long it will take to complete. Then tack on another 25% as a buffer against mistakes, interruptions, or unanticipated problems.
2. Set aside a time each day to study.
3. Study in blocks of one hour. Take a five-minute break in-between. Use a kitchen timer or the alarm on your watch.
4. Look over your notes every day. Even if you don't have homework or an upcoming exam, take five to ten minutes every day to look over your notes for each subject. This will help prevent having to cram before a test.
5. Write down assignments as soon as they are given.
6. Study your hardest assignments first while you're more alert.

7. Say no to social invitations if you have to study for an exam or complete a project.
8. Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones. If you have a paper to write, break it down into researching, outlining, and writing.
9. Chunk your time. If you have two weeks to do an assignment, figure out how much time (plus 25%) it will take. Then divide by the number of days until it's due and do a little bit every day.
10. Keep file folders to hold paperwork for each class, and color code them.

Beating Procrastination

1. Do the worst thing first. Study for your hardest class or do a chore you dislike to get it out of the way.
2. Think small. Set up small goals. Need to clean your room? Focus on one bookshelf or one corner at a time. Reward yourself when you finish each goal.
3. Set a timer, and work on a chore or task for just 10 or 15 minutes at a time.
4. Say, "I choose to" instead of "I have to." We often rebel when we feel we "should" do something.
5. Jump in! Stop waiting for the right moment or talking about what you're going to do, and do it!

Getting Organized (Looking for things wastes time.)

1. Make your lunch, and set out your clothes and items needed for school the night before.
2. Clean out your locker every Friday. Take loose papers home to sort and organize.
3. Make a place for everything in your room. Keep loose school papers in a cardboard box, for example.
4. Take a few minutes every day to straighten up your desk at home. Keep the supplies you need to study on your desk.
5. Hang a clear, plastic shoebag over your bedroom door, and use it to place little items that can end up as clutter.

Time Traps to Avoid

1. Overscheduling your calendar
2. Committing to too many activities
3. Cutting down on sleep to squeeze more in your day
4. Giving up when you have a setback managing your time
5. Failing to set goals

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