

Wellness

The Insidious Effects of Hurrying

by Kandi Wiens

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Summary. As the demands of work and personal life blur in an era of hyperconnectivity and hustle culture, hurry sickness — characterized by behaviors and emotions like impatience, chronic rushing, and a constant sense of time scarcity — is more... [more](#)

In today's fast-paced world, the pressure to do more, achieve more, and be more in less time has become a pervasive part of modern life — and it's wearing employees out. The authors of one [study](#) on professional service firms found that the majority of respondents described their jobs as “highly demanding, exhausting, and chaotic,” and also took it for granted “that working long hours was necessary for their professional success.” Their conclusions echo the results of another recent [global](#)

workforce survey based on more than 56,000 employees, where 45% said their workload had significantly increased over the past 12 months and more than half felt there was too much change at their workplace happening too quickly.

This relentless urgency can result in a phenomenon known as “hurry sickness,” a term first introduced in 1974 by cardiologists Meyer Friedman and R.H. Rosenman to describe the damaging effects of Type A (i.e., high-achieving) behavior on cardiovascular health. Hurry sickness isn’t a diagnosable condition, but it encapsulates a set of behaviors and emotions — impatience, chronic rushing, and a constant sense of time scarcity — that can wreak havoc on a person’s physical and mental well-being.

While the onus should be on employers to address many of the root causes of hurry sickness — hustle culture, incentives to overwork, and constant organizational change, for example — there are steps you can take to mitigate it even in non-ideal circumstances. Here, we’ll explore the profound consequences of hurry sickness and outline several strategies to reclaim your time and peace of mind.

Why Hurry Sickness Is Dangerous

The anxiety and chronic stress that come from a frantic, always-on lifestyle and the belief that you’re chronically short on time can result in high blood pressure, headaches, and insomnia. High blood pressure and symptoms of anxiety and depression (commonly referred to as psychological distress) are known risk factors for cardiovascular disease and even death. A large meta study found that psychological distress alone increased risk of

mortality from *any* cause — and the higher the psychological distress, the higher the risk of death, even after adjusting for factors such as age, body mass index, smoking, physical activity, and alcohol consumption.

Hurry sickness can also leave you physically and mentally exhausted as you rush from task to task and don't allow time for basic self-care such as regular, healthy meals, adequate sleep, and taking breaks. Increasingly fatigued, your immune system can become suppressed, leading to greater susceptibility to infectious illness.

At work, hurry sickness can lead to poor decision-making as well as suboptimal outcomes when you don't take time to think things through, or when rushing results in careless errors. Deep in the throes of hurry sickness, you experience a decreased ability to absorb, process, and use new information, and your ability to innovate can suffer as well, as creativity usually can't be hurried. Relationships can suffer because you're easily irritated when others don't keep up with your intense pace, or because you're openly skeptical of their ability to get things done efficiently. When relationships falter, team dynamics suffer — as does team output, as effective collaboration is compromised. When chronic workplace stress leads to exhaustion, negativity, and underperformance, the final outcome of hurry sickness can be full-blown burnout.

Identifying Hurry Sickness

One of the things that makes hurry sickness difficult to detect is its ability to come disguised as efficiency, productivity, achievement, or creating value for the organization. As each of these are prized qualities and signs of high performance, you may not even realize something is wrong until your constant hurrying exacts a price.

See if any of these signs and symptoms of hurry sickness are present in your own experience at work:

- **Everything feels urgent.** You frequently feel restless, anxious, or worried because everything feels like it must be attended to at once and finished as quickly as possible.
- **You're always in a rush.** You walk, talk, carry out tasks, and even drive at a rapid pace. You tend to interrupt others or hurry them along and constantly multitask in an attempt to finish more things more quickly.
- **You're preoccupied with the passage of time.** It feels as though time is always slipping away from you, you feel compelled to “beat the clock,” and you're always on the lookout for shortcuts and timesavers.
- **You always feel behind schedule.** Despite your efforts, you frequently worry about falling behind — even when deadlines aren't imminent or others consider you highly productive and ahead of schedule.
- **You're low on patience and easily irritated.** Even minor delays can trigger stress and frustration, and you can lose your temper when something (or someone) comes between you and completing a task.
- **You deprioritize your own well-being in favor of efficiency and productivity.** Getting things done is always on your mind and takes precedence over everything else. You sacrifice sleep, meals, exercise, time with loved ones, time away from work, or hobbies in favor of accomplishing things — and the quicker, the better.
- **You're uncomfortable with downtime and rarely take time to rest.** You consider slowing down or taking a break a waste of

time. Being unoccupied can make you anxious, irritable, impatient, or fidgety.

- **You get pleasure from getting things done.** Pleasurable experiences trigger the release of dopamine, the neurotransmitter known colloquially as the feel-good hormone. It's dopamine that delivers a reward in the form of potent feelings of pleasure and satisfaction — and that motivates us to repeat a pleasurable action to experience the reward again. For those who love productivity and efficiency, there may be no greater reward than getting things done.

In most professional environments today, the onus is on the individual to carve out and preserve their own boundaries. This is already difficult in work cultures that prize rapid results and overwork, but as Drs. Meyer and Rosenman point out, certain personality traits can increase one's susceptibility to hurry sickness. In addition to the Type A behavior pattern, perfectionists, people pleasers, and those who equate productivity with self-worth can be at higher risk. Perfectionists often spend inordinate time on tasks in an attempt to achieve an unrealistic ideal, which steals time from other necessary tasks and leaves them quite literally hurrying to catch up. People pleasers run the risk of saying yes to every request, leaving them overwhelmed, rushed, and in danger of falling behind. And many achievement-oriented individuals locate their self-worth in how much they can produce, and how quickly.

How to Overcome Hurry Sickness

Though the costs of hurry sickness can be dire, the remedies are readily available. Try these tips and tactics to begin slowing down and regaining your health — without compromising performance:

Implement forcing functions.

A forcing function is any mechanism or activity that by design compels a particular result or behavior. With hurry sickness, the goal is to decrease your sense of time scarcity and high urgency. Effective forcing functions might include blocking off buffer time on your calendar to deal with unexpected tasks; reserving time for deep, undistracted work with no particular end goal; and scheduling time to reflect on and reprioritize your to-do list so you're not approaching everything with the same sense of urgency.

Pause before saying yes.

Not only do you need to examine your calendar to see if you actually *can* accept a request, you need to reflect to see if you *should*. Are you the only person who can fulfill it? Will it demand too much of your time, energy, or resources? Does it support your own goals and reflect your values? Once hurry sickness has become a lifestyle it will be difficult to slow down before saying yes, so you may need to enlist the help of an objective advisor whose feedback you trust. You can also use the next tactic.

Write down the consequences of saying yes.

Pausing to write down what will happen if you say yes to an incoming request is a natural forcing function that compels you to slow down and prevents you from saying yes automatically. I prefer doing this exercise in longhand for the deeper thoughtfulness the extra time allows. Is the amount of stress associated with this task tolerable? Will the request take too much time away from activities outside of work or simply recharging? Seeing the consequences literally spelled out before you not only slows you down, it can be a great wake-up call.

Write down the benefits of slowing down.

For extra accountability and inspiration, try the flip side: Make a list of all the positives you can enjoy if you slow down even a little. For many, it's extra sleep, more time for relationships, and a greater sense of relaxation and peace.

Use a tool to help you prioritize.

Hurry sickness can mask what is truly high priority by leading you to believe that everything is, so bring some objectivity to your to-do list.

Many of my coaching clients like the tried-and-true 4D method. Assign each of your tasks to one of four categories: *Do* tasks are essential and high-priority; *Defer* (or *Delay*) tasks can be done a little later; *Delegate* tasks can be handed off to someone else; and *Delete* tasks are the ones that, upon further examination, actually aren't essential. Bonus tip: Don't add another to-do to your list before crossing one off.

Prioritize grace over accomplishment.

One of my executive coaching clients is a self-described dopamine addict who relishes the feeling of her brain's reward system getting a high-five as she checks things off her to-do list. When she doesn't accomplish goals as rapidly as she would like, she feels frustrated and irritable and is hard on herself for not meeting her own expectations.

Fortunately, she's finding relief from the self-induced stress by learning to extend grace to herself, a powerful form of self-compassion that allows us to direct our energy in a healthier, more productive way. In her case, she lets herself off the hook by making an inventory of all the things she *did* get done, and counteracts negative self-talk by running it through the "friend

test”: Is this anything she would say to a friend? If not, she lets it go and moves on.

Practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness is nothing more than slowing down to give your full, non-judgmental attention to the present moment — in many ways, the very antithesis of hurry sickness. Even practicing mindfulness for a few minutes at a time — such as through deep breathing, a simple body scan, bringing your full attention to a routine physical task such as brewing a cup of tea, or spending a few moments listening to calming music — can quickly lower stress and give your over-taxed mind a needed break. Practiced over time, mindfulness can decrease your fixation on rushing to get things done and is a key ingredient in a healthy, focused, and balanced life.

Seek support.

If the root causes of your hurry sickness run deep or if you simply find it too difficult to manage your time urgency on your own, seeking help from a therapist, executive coach, employee resource group, or support group can be an essential part of a long-term cure. Accountability partners can also help you keep up with daily habits that bring a much-needed dose of slowness to your life.

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As the demands of work and personal life blur in an era of hyperconnectivity and hustle culture, hurry sickness is more insidious than ever, quietly sabotaging productivity, relationships, and health. If you find yourself with an urgent need to slow down, your health, your teams, the people you serve through your work, and your loved ones will thank you for taking steps to free yourself from hurry sickness. Remember, it's not

about how fast you go; it's about how well you use the time you have.



Kandi Wiens, EdD, is a senior fellow at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and the author of the book [*Burnout Immunity: How Emotional Intelligence Can Help You Build Resilience and Heal Your Relationship with Work*](#) (HarperCollins, 2024). A nationally known researcher and speaker on burnout, emotional intelligence, and resilience, she developed the [Burnout Quiz](#) to help people understand if they're at risk of burning out.



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