

PART #1

Stress relief: When and how to say no

Sure it's easier to say yes, but at what price to your peace of mind? Here's why saying no may be a healthier option for stress relief.

[By Mayo Clinic staff](#)

Is your plate piled high with deadlines and obligations that you're trying to squeeze in between meetings? Are you trying to cram too many activities into too little time? If so, stress relief can be as straightforward as just saying no.

Why say no?

The number of worthy requests isn't likely to lessen, and you can't add more available time to your day. Are you doomed then to be overcommitted? The answer is no, not if you're willing to say no. It may not be the easy way, but it is a path to stress relief.

Consider these reasons for saying no:

Saying no isn't necessarily selfish. When you say no to a new commitment, you're honoring your existing obligations and ensuring that you'll be able to devote quality time to them.

Saying no can allow you to try new things. Just because you've always helped plan the company softball tournament doesn't mean that you have to keep doing it forever. Saying no will give you time to pursue other interests.

Always saying yes isn't healthy. When you're overcommitted and under too much stress, you're more likely to feel run-down and possibly get sick.

Saying yes can cut others out. On the other hand, when you say no you open the door for others to step up. They may not do things exactly the way you would, but that's OK. They'll find their own way.

When to say no

Sometimes it's tough to determine which activities deserve your time and attention. Use these strategies to evaluate obligations — and opportunities — that come your way.

Focus on what matters most. Examine your current obligations and overall priorities before making any new commitments. Ask yourself if the new commitment is important to you. If it's something you feel strongly about, by all means do it. If not, take a pass.

Weigh the yes-to-stress ratio. Is the new activity you're considering a short- or long-term commitment? For example, making a batch of cookies for the school bake sale will take far less time than heading up the school fundraising committee. Don't say yes if it will mean months of added stress. Instead, look for other ways to pitch in.

Take guilt out of the equation. Don't agree to a request you would rather decline because of feelings of guilt or obligation. Doing so will likely lead to additional stress and resentment.

Sleep on it. Are you tempted by a friend's invitation to volunteer at your old alma mater or join a weekly golf league? Before you respond, take a day to think about the request and how it fits in with your current commitments.

How to say no

No. Nope. Nah. See how simple it is to say one little word, allowing you to take a pass on tasks that don't make the cut? Of course, there will be times when it's just not that easy. Here are some things to keep in mind when you need to say no:

Say no. The word "no" has power. Don't be afraid to use it. Be careful about using wimpy substitute phrases, such as "I'm not sure" or "I don't think I can." These can be interpreted to mean that you might say yes later.

Be brief. State your reason for refusing the request, but don't go on about it. Avoid elaborate justifications or explanations.

Be honest. Don't fabricate reasons to get out of an obligation. The truth is always the best way to turn down a friend, family member or co-worker.

Be respectful. Many good causes land at your door and it can be tough to turn them down. Complimenting the group's effort while saying that you can't commit at this time shows that you respect what they're trying to accomplish.

Be ready to repeat. You may find it necessary to refuse a request several times before the other person accepts your response. When that happens, just hit the replay button. Calmly repeat your no, with or without your original rationale, as needed.

Saying no won't be easy if you're used to saying yes all the time. But learning to say no is an important part of simplifying your life and managing your stress. And with practice, you may find saying no gets easier.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-relief/SR00039>

PART #2

Say No to People Making Demands on Your Time

By [Elizabeth Scott, M.S.](#), About.com Guide; Updated September 25, 2007

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Too busy? Learn to say no to new demands! (Picture from iStockPhoto.com)

Are you [overscheduled and overstressed](#)? With today's busy schedules, you're not alone. One way to pare down your schedule is to get good at saying no to new commitments. Whether you say "yes" instead of no out of guilt, inner conflict, or a misguided notion that you can "do it all," learning to say no to more requests can be one of the biggest favors you can do yourself and those you love. It helps reduce stress levels and gives you time for what's really important.

Difficulty: Easy

Time Required: Very little. And it will free up time for what's important!

Here's How:

1. Just say, "I'm sorry. I can't do this right now." Use a sympathetic, but firm tone. If pressured as to why, reply that it doesn't fit with your schedule, and change the subject. Most reasonable people will accept this as an answer, so if someone keeps pressuring you, they're being rude, and it's OK to just repeat, "I'm sorry, but this just doesn't fit with my schedule," and change the subject, or even walk away if you have to.
2. If you're uncomfortable being so firm, or are dealing with pushy people, it's OK to say, "Let me think about it and get back to you." This gives you a chance to review your schedule, as well as your feelings about saying "yes" to another commitment, do a cost-benefit analysis, and then get back to them with a yes or no. Most importantly, this tactic helps you avoid letting yourself be pressured into overscheduling your life and taking on too much stress.
3. If you would really like to do what they're requesting, but don't have the time (or are having trouble accepting that you don't), it's fine to say, "I can't do this, but I *can*..." and mention a lesser commitment that you can make. This way you'll still be partially involved, but it will be on your own terms.

Tips:

1. Be firm -- not defensive or overly apologetic -- and polite. This gives the signal that you are sympathetic, but will not easily change your mind if pressured.
2. If you decide to tell the person you'll get back to them, be matter-of-fact and not too promising. If you lead people to believe you'll likely say "yes" later, they'll be more disappointed with a later "no."
3. If asked for an explanation, remember that you really don't owe anyone one. "It doesn't fit with my schedule," is perfectly acceptable.
4. Remember that there are only so many hours in the day. This means that whatever you choose to take on limits your ability to do other things. So even if you somehow *can* fit a new commitment into your schedule, if it's not more important than what you would have to give up to do it (including time for relaxation and [self care](#)), you really *don't* have the time in your schedule.

PART #3

20 Ways To Say No

By Ramona Creel

I AM IN THE MIDDLE OF SEVERAL PROJECTS

let people know when you have accepted other responsibilities
no need to make excuses if you don't have any free time
no one will fault you for having already filled your plate

I AM NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THAT

you might be uncomfortable with any of a number of issues
the people involved, the type of work, the morale implications, etc.
this is a very respectful way to avoid a sticky situation

I AM NOT TAKING ON ANY NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

you aren't saying that you will never help out again
just that you feel your schedule is as full as you would like now
understanding your limits is a talent to be expected

I AM NOT THE MOST QUALIFIED PERSON FOR THE JOB

if you don't feel that you have adequate skills, that's okay
it's better to admit your limitations up front
the best way to avoid feeling overwhelmed down the road

I DO NOT ENJOY THAT KIND OF WORK

life isn't about drudgery -- if you don't enjoy it, why do it?
don't be afraid to let someone know you just don't want to
someone else is bound to enjoy the work you don't

I DO NOT HAVE ANY MORE ROOM IN MY CALENDAR

be honest if your schedule is filled
"filled" doesn't have to mean really filled
know when you are scheduled as much as you are willing and stop

I HATE TO SPLIT MY ATTENTION AMONG PROJECTS

let people know that you want to do a good job for them
but you can't when your focus is too divided or splintered
you will be more effective if you focus on one project at a time

I HAVE ANOTHER COMMITMENT

it doesn't matter what the commitment is
it can even simply be time to yourself or with friends or family
you don't have to justify -- you simply aren't available

I HAVE NO EXPERIENCE WITH THAT

volunteering shouldn't mean learning an entirely new set of skills
suggest that they find someone who has experience in that area
offer to help out with something that you already know how to do

I KNOW YOU WILL DO A WONDERFUL JOB YOURSELF

people often ask for help because they doubt their own abilities
let them know that you have confidence they will succeed
you are actually doing them a favor in the long run

I NEED TO FOCUS MORE ON MY PERSONAL LIFE

don't be ashamed of wanting to spend time with your family
having a strong family is an important priority in and of itself
be willing to put your personal needs first

I NEED TO FOCUS ON MY CAREER RIGHT NOW

often, you have to focus your energies on a work-related task
you may have to give up some civic or community duties
if you don't do it, someone else will take on the task

I NEED TO LEAVE SOME FREE TIME FOR MYSELF

it's okay to be selfish -- in a good way!
treat your personal time like any other appointment
block off time in your calendar and guard it with your life

I WOULD RATHER DECLINE THAN DO A MEDIOCRE JOB

know when you aren't going to be able to deliver a quality product
the reason doesn't matter -- not enough time, wrong skills, etc.
whatever the reason is enough for turning a request down

I WOULD RATHER HELP OUT WITH ANOTHER TASK

saying no doesn't mean that you can't help at all
if someone asks you to do something you really despise, refuse
then offer to help with something you find more enjoyable

LET ME HOOK YOU UP WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN DO IT

if you aren't available to help out, offer another qualified resource
helping to connect people is a valuable service to offer
make sure the person you refer will represent you well

NO

sometimes it's okay to just say no!
just say it in a way that expresses respect and courtesy
leave the door open for good relations

NOT RIGHT NOW, BUT I CAN DO IT LATER

if you really want to help but don't have time, say so
offer to help at a later time or date
if they can't wait for you, they'll find someone else

SOME THINGS HAVE COME UP THAT NEED MY ATTENTION

unexpected things happen that throw your schedule off
accept that you may need to make a few adjustments
it is temporary and you will have more time when life stabilizes

THIS REALLY IS NOT MY STRONG SUIT

it's okay to admit your limitations
knowing what you can handle and what you can't is a skill
your time will be more efficiently spent on something you do well

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