



Healthy & Resilient You

Stay Whelmed

Reducing pressure in the face of constant overwhelm



“

I know you can be underwhelmed, and you can be overwhelmed, but can you just be whelmed?

– “Chastity Church” in the movie *Ten Things I Hate About You* by Karen McCullah and Kirsten Smith

”

The words *overwhelm* and *whelm* entered English vocabulary during the Middle Ages. Back then, they meant the same thing, which was “to overturn or engulf.” Eventually, *whelm* largely fell out of use until very recently, when it began reappearing in pop culture to mean, “moderately impressed, neutral, or under control.” (*Underwhelm*, “to fail to impress, disappoint,” also joined the party in the 1930s but we’ll save that for another newsletter.)

Why the linguistics lesson? Well, in terms of our collective wellbeing journey, our lives have imitated our vocabulary. We’ve gotten so used to *overwhelm*—the word and the state of being—that we’ve forgotten there are other options.

Overwhelmed by Default?

Overwhelm happens when life’s complexity exceeds our ability to cope. And modern life with its constant inundation of stimulus and responsibility is exceedingly complicated.

Every day we juggle work and personal life, bottomless email inboxes, a zillion streaming channels, social media, 24-7 “news,” and...and... All of it warring for our attention and keeping us in a state of constant frenzy.

How can we even tell we’re overwhelmed if constantly frenzied is our daily baseline? Here are some signs to watch out for:



MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL

Unusually moody or pessimistic, struggling to concentrate or think rationally, overreacting to minor stressors, feeling paralyzed and unable to function.



PHYSICAL

Rapid heartbeat, trouble breathing, dizziness, fatigue, headaches, cramps, upset stomach, or other aches and pains.

When we're persistently overwhelmed, it triggers chronic stress and can lead to developing heart disease, digestive problems, headaches, sleep and substance use disorders, and take a huge toll on our mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life.

In extreme cases, when people feel so hopelessly overwhelmed that they'll never be able to cope or that their troubles will always outweigh their resources, it can even lead to thoughts or acts of self-harm and suicide*.

Being overwhelmed is serious, so it's important not to brush it off when it happens. Instead, look to the following list to build some practical, personalized, coping strategies.

How to go from constant red alert to comfortably whelmed.



Acknowledge and accept – Everyone gets overwhelmed sometimes, so be kind to yourself when it happens to you. Try not to think, "I should be able to handle this," or, "I'm being dramatic." If you're overwhelmed, you're overwhelmed. Do your best to accept that without judgment.



Step away and take breaks – Having to be constantly connected or always on is a huge contributor to being overwhelmed. Intentionally set time aside to take short breaks during the weekday and intentionally disconnect on evenings and weekends. If you're so overwhelmed that you feel paralyzed or can't think straight, stop what you're doing as soon as safely possible to take a [power breathing break](#).



Figure out why you're overwhelmed – This seems like a big "duh," but it's important. The next time you feel overwhelmed, ask yourself, "What's causing me to feel this way?" Write down all the situations and stressors that come to mind.



Focus on what you can control – Once you've made your list, use [this Circle of Influence technique](#) to help clarify what you can and can't control. Zoom in on the things you can control and think of ways to [work through them](#), delegate them, or [say no to them](#).



Ask for support – Look to your work network for help with tasks or work concerns. Reach out to a friend or loved one to vent or talk through your feelings. The people around you generally want to help, so let them.



Talk to a Concern counselor – If your stress levels or overwhelm don't improve, our counselors are here to listen with a sympathetic ear and help you build effective coping strategies.

Finally, don't forget that Concern is here specifically to help you through life's ups and downs, including supporting you when you're overwhelmed. We offer many other benefits beyond counseling. Call us at **800.344.4222** for immediate confidential support, and we'll help you find the combination of services, resources, and expertise you need to get whelmed.

**If you believe self-harm or suicide is imminent, call 911 immediately.*



For customized tools and resources, visit Concern's Digital Platform by logging in to employees.concernhealth.com, and selecting the "Get Services" button in the upper right menu.

This newsletter is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be used to replace professional advice.

If you find your level of stress is impacting your wellbeing, you can contact us for additional help and support.

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