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“When the soul is exhausted, we suffer from loss of joy and hope.”

Mary Jaksch, Goodlife Zen blog (posted on Zen Habits)

Regularly working overtime may be affecting your mind. Middle-aged workers who consistently work overtime may be at risk for mild cognitive impairment (MCI), a factor used to predict dementia, according to a recent Medscape News article.

The European study, led by Marianna Virtanen, PhD from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in Helsinki, followed a group of middle-aged British civil servants who worked an average of 55 hours a week. They were compared to colleagues who worked 35 to 40 hours a week.

Those who worked more hours scored lower on a vocabulary test and showed a “greater decline in reasoning ability than their colleagues who worked 35 to 40 hours,” the article said. Researchers said work-related factors along with biological age and disease may contribute to cognitive decline.

The researchers noted in Europe in 2001 that an estimated 12% to 17% of employees worked overtime, and long hours are linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, fatigue and depression. Although the Medscape story didn’t go into detail about this point, I can imagine the long hours contribute to less self-care, bad food, and little exercise.

In today’s economy, people are reeling from layoffs or trying to keep the job they have, no matter how many hours they have to work. The economy in general has added another stress layer to the workday, and stress causes problems. Someone recently asked me how important time management and organizing skills are now in this economy. She asked, “Does it really matter right now?” Yes, even more.

No matter what the economy is like, we all should **work smarter instead of harder**. By saving seconds and minutes here and there, it all adds up like change in a jar. It could mean the difference between working overtime or leaving on time. Here are a few ways to work smarter:

Set the rules. Use rules to send certain e-mails automatically to the “Deleted Items” folder or other file folders. Click on Tools and scroll down to Rules and Alerts. For inside MD Anderson, click [here](#). For outside MD Anderson, click [here](#).

The rules automatically send e-mails where you want them to go, and you never see them in your inbox. You will see the numbers of new emails in parentheses next to the folder names. The good thing is you can make exceptions for every rule you create. It's an investment of time up front, but will save you so much down the road. You can even right click on an email and create rules as you go.

Just a couple of examples you can use for rules:

- Send you an alert if your boss e-mails you.

- Send listserv articles and newsletters to a reading folder.

- Send those forwarded e-mails from your Aunt Millie straight to deleted items.

Another speed key. Use Alt + Tab to switch between open windows on your monitor. It saves you from clicking with your mouse. If you have more than two pages open, a box pops up with the icons of the open programs, and you tab (while keeping ALT down) to the one you want and let go.

Turn off the e-mail alert. My ADD people love the flashing note on the bottom alerting them to a new e-mail, but it is very distracting, even more so to those with ADD. Click on "Tools" and scroll to "Options." Click on "Email Options" and then on "Advanced Email Options." In the middle of the box, uncheck the checks.

Use a Virtual Assistant. This is one thing that Tim Ferriss, author of *The Four Work Week*, advocates as a way to save time and delegate tasks. He uses AskSunday.com, a virtual assistant company that works 24/7. You can make up to so many requests a month, depending on the plan you choose (the most popular is \$37 a month). Sample requests include booking a flight or rental car; ordering flowers; e-mailing your reminders on certain days; calling the doctor's office, among other items.

Self-Help Dropout

Comedian and actor Chris Hardwick wrote an hilarious article for Wired Magazine about his time with three time management books – *Getting Things Done* by David Allen, *Never Check E-mail in the Morning* by Julie Morgenstern and *The Four-Hour Work Week* by Tim Ferriss. If you want to find out what squirrels, Rod Zombie, and *Man Men* have to do with time management and procrastination, [read his article](#).

Have You Scheduled Your Vacation?

Every August, there is a panic in our hollowed halls at work. It's a weird panic about *having* to take a vacation. Each year, we're allowed to carry a certain number of PTO (Paid Time Off) days into the next fiscal year. Anyone with above that number either has to take the days off before Sept. 1 or lose them. The panic ensues. People suddenly go missing in August but still email. I call them "office ghosts" – those people who take off but still call and e-mail in.

This is one of my soapboxes (okay, one of many). If you haven't effectively planned your vacation hours and have to scramble at the end of the fiscal year to burn off time, then you have a time management issue. If you take regular vacations, you won't run into the problem of having too many days off.

Vacations are important. They're a great way to refresh yourself and your brain. Vacations are also for the people who work around you, and no one likes to be around the grumpy person who needs time off. Yeah, yeah, you'll have lots of e-mails when you get back. So what? You'll be in a better frame of mind to deal with them. The biggest kicker: Any work establishment will get along without you for a week or two. Promise.

When you go on vacation, GO! Don't call in, check work e-mail, or come into the office. Go on vacation – even if you're just staying home – and don't think about work. Get the schedule out now, if you haven't already, and figure when you're getting out of Dodge. Your brain and your co-workers will thank you.

Got Clutter? I have developed 15 minute, 30 minute and 45 minute presentations on organizing, time management, and productivity. Moving to a new building? I also have a 30-minute presentation on preparing for a move for your department. I also do one-on-one sessions in your office and help you come up with a solution to your organizing problems. To schedule a presentation or a one-on-one appointment, call 713-792-8061 or email jsimon@mdanderson.org. **For past newsletters, click [here](#).** *Follow me on Twitter! Look up JaniceSimon. For Facebook, look for Janice M. Simon.*

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