

# 6 Signs You Have Too Much on Your Plate

Overworked? Here's when to speak up so you don't burn out.

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Are you an employee who does too much? Almost everyone has too much to do today, both employees and managers alike. But when does enough become too much? It's important to know how to recognize the telltale signs of being overworked before they morph into burnout. Fortunately, predictable red flags appear that signal when you've either been assigned – or taken on – more than you can reasonably handle. Here are six ways to tell that you have too much on your plate, and what you can do about it:

**1. You're saying "yes" to everything.** If the boss assigns it, you have to do it – right? The answer is: It depends. If you're receiving too many assignments to be able to do any of them justice, you need to let your supervisor know that you're too swamped to take on everything. "Learning to say no and advocating for your own time is an important lesson in the workforce," says Kristy Willis, senior vice president of Adecco Staffing U.S. Management consultant Michael Provitera points out that many employees' respect for authority figures makes them cringe at the thought of pushing back on an assignment. Yet when being a "yes person" results in conflicting projects and day-to-day tasks (sometimes coming from multiple managers), it's time to learn to say "no" to superiors' requests. "Let the bosses know that you have a certain amount of priorities that you are working on now from each of them," Provitera says. "Then ask which priority is more important, and go to work on that one first."

**2. You're feeling overwhelmed.** It's hard to stay focused when you have a hundred items on your to-do list and a thousand unopened emails. Feeling overwhelmed and not knowing where to start are harbingers of burnout. To bring order to the chaos, career coach Jacqueline Twillie suggests taking the time to think through each step of a project before just diving in. "This will save you time in the form of eliminating duplication of activities and just sitting around for 30 minutes trying to decide what to do," Twillie says. She adds that productivity apps, such as Trello and Evernote can help you wrap your arms around an extensive to-do list.

**3. You're procrastinating.** Have you found yourself spending more time dinking around on Facebook as your deadlines creep closer? This is another sign that you have too much to do. "It's a red flag when employees who never used to dally on social media while on the job are now spending more time there," says productivity consultant Helene Segura. "It's a procrastination crutch when folks are on overload and can't decide which of the millions of things to do next."

**4. You're waking up in the middle of the night with work on the brain.** When your mind won't let go of your workday to the extent that it's interfering with your sleep, it means your plate is too full. Constant late night work sessions, even when done from home, are also a red flag. "Emails at odd times of the night or in the very early morning may be a sign that the eight-hour day is simply not enough to get it done and that employees feel pressured to choose pushing past their limits versus getting needed rest," says HR executive and executive coach John Haynes.

**5. You're making rookie errors.** Diminished work quality and missing deadlines that you're used to hitting means you're trying to do too much. "When an employee with a track record of on-time, high-quality delivery suddenly starts missing deadlines or submitting error-ridden work, it's a red flag," says Leigh Steere, co-founder of Managing Better People. Willis agrees and suggests speaking to your supervisor if your excessive workload is causing you to drop balls. "Addressing the issue in terms of not being able to produce high-quality work can help them understand that it's in the best interest for everyone if your load is lessened," Willis says.

**6. You're spending every weekend catching up on work.** Pulling an occasional weekender is par for the course in many competitive industries. But if you can't remember the last time you saw your family on the weekend, the pattern needs to change – especially if your weekend work isn't moving you any closer to you reaching your work goals. Executive coach Elene Cafasso recommends first accepting that it's physically impossible to get everything done if you've been overloaded to this extent. Next, prioritize what really matters. "What are the three to four priorities that will drive your business and create the results you'll be held accountable for?" Cafasso says. "Do those things first. Communicate freely and often about those things so you'll be seen as a person getting results for the business and strategically in tune enough to know what's important."

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