



Episode 46 - Strategies to Avoid Mental Fatigue

Transcript

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I recently had a listener reach out regarding how to avoid mental fatigue. Her email resonated so much with me because that's something I've been dealing with. I haven't shared too much but earlier this year, I had surgery. It was a pretty big surgery and I thought since I'm still young and healthy, I'd have a couple rough weeks and then bounce right back. I couldn't have been more wrong. It knocked me off my feet. Sure I could physically move around but I was exhausted. I was so burnt out and I think it added to how I was feeling even before my surgery. I had been putting out weekly episodes of the podcast while working a full time job, a part time job and taking care of my family. But I was committed and determined to do it all. Until I physically couldn't do it all and then I mentally shut down. I'm so good at telling other people to set boundaries, and find ways to help my friends carve out time for themselves but when it came to myself, I couldn't do it. Because there was always something to do. So I was go, go, go. Non stop. Until I just couldn't do it anymore. Since then I've been working hard to find myself, find ways to also prioritize my needs while still focussing on the things that are important to me. But I'd be lying if I said it was easy. My sleeps been affected. I have no problems falling asleep but staying asleep, that's a whole other problem for me. I wake up in the middle of the night unable to quiet my mind. I'd think, "I just gotta get this done so I stop thinking about it" but when I'd wake up in the morning, the task felt so much bigger than it was. I just couldn't do it. So weird and so unusual for me. I realized I'm completely burnt out. My mind was protesting and went on strike. I know I'm not alone because I'm an open book and I will share how I feel with others, hoping I can get insight and feedback and maybe a little understanding. I couldn't believe how many people said they felt exactly the way I did. The answer was to slow down and take a break for myself. Start to prioritize my needs too.

Intro and Music

I really can't have a podcast helping incredible RDs2Be without addressing mental fatigue. Like I mentioned, it happened to me even though I thought I was immune to it. I'm always on the go, non-stop, taking on new challenges and gaining knowledge by taking courses, and reading books, and practicing new tools I've learned. It's so much fun. But it's also exhausting. And I was doing really well, until I wasn't anymore. I got burnt out. I mean really burnt out. So bad that I'd walk over a piece of paper on the floor in the middle of the room because I just didn't care anymore or I didn't have the energy to actually bend down and pick it up. It seems so silly when I think about it but that's how I felt. I've never been like that. I'm clean. I like everything in its place. So when it

happened, I had no idea what was going on. But the truth is, I kept saying yes even to things I didn't want to say yes to when I really should've said no. Everyone else and everything else came first and I put myself last. And it was weighing heavy on me. I cried...a lot. Often when I was driving and sometimes with my close friends when I couldn't hold it in anymore. I'd even get to the point where I remember having a conversation with someone and walk away and think, "What did I just say" because I couldn't remember all the details of the conversation. Not because I wasn't listening. I wasn't retaining what I heard because I was not really present. I was physically there but not fully there mentally. Of all the things that were red flags, that was probably the biggest one for me. Because being present is a huge value of mine. I want to be present for the people I care about and the people I work with. Because why do something and go through the motions when you don't give your best. I had to make a change. I share all this because I don't think I'm alone or unique in this experience. I know I'm not because I've talked to so many people who feel the same way at various times of their life. And I've been asked this question by a few listeners. So if one person asks, then others are thinking and feeling it too. And I've definitely been there so I know first hand what it feels like or worse, what happens mentally and physically when it happens. So my goal is for it to not happen to you too.

So I wanted to share some tips and strategies I've done to help me overcome these feelings. And I say overcome lightly. I should probably use the word address because if I'm not careful, I get right back into the never ending circle. I'm gonna focus on tips for studying and taking the exam since that's the goal of this podcast. But you can also use these tips if you've already passed the exam and are working as a Registered Dietitian because mental fatigue can happen to anyone.

So the first step is to start with creating a study plan. If you haven't already downloaded the free resource I have on how to create a study plan, I recommend you do so. As you study, break the content down into manageable chunks. Study for a period of time you can focus on. Some people are ok studying for a couple hours then taking a break while others may need breaks more often. You know yourself best. I've learned for myself that taking breaks more often helps me get back into what I'm doing faster. I find I can stay more focused. During your break, walk around, drink some water. Maybe get some fresh air. Go to the bathroom. Listen to a song that makes you feel inspired or pumped to keep studying. Or maybe listen to something that helps calm your nerves if you're feeling anxious. Once you've done that, go back to studying. If you find your mind wandering while you're studying, have a notebook next to you where you can write down the thoughts. You can go back to those thoughts when you're on your break. This is called the Pomodoro Technique.

Another tip to help prevent mental fatigue is to make sure you get good quality sleep and enough sleep. I'll be honest, I'm not good at this recently but I used to be a great sleeper when I was studying and in college. It's

something I'm prioritizing because when I don't get enough sleep, I can't focus as good as when I have a good nights sleep. So make sure you prioritize sleep. Your studying will be much better. You'll retain more information and you won't have heavy and droopy eyes while studying. And this is absolutely true for the day of your exam. Getting a good nights sleep should be one of your top priorities before the exam so you can stay focused on the questions during the exam and be well rested.

This next tip is something I know you fully agree with and that's to take care of yourself and have a healthy lifestyle. By eating good nutritious foods, and drinking enough water, getting enough physical activity, all of this not only helps your mental health, but it also helps your physical health. And make sure you're walking. Get some fresh air, get outside and move your body. I've been prioritizing walking which has always been one of my favorite things and it's tremendously helped my mental health and helped me feel more energized to do the things I need to do.

Focus on relaxation tips. Meditation, breathing techniques, and checking your mindset are essential for preventing mental fatigue. This is where I've put a lot of my focus lately. For those of you who get my emails, I've shared about my journey with Transcendental Meditation or TM for short. It's really improved my quality of life. I've sometimes used the excuse that I'm "too busy" to do it. But that's not a good excuse because even a couple minutes of TM really changes my mental health and mental fitness. I get clarity, my mind flows better, I get good ideas and sometimes come up with solutions to problems I didn't have before I meditated. The best analogy I have for how meditation works is that it clears the traffic jam in my brain. If you're interested in learning more about TM and finding someone in your area who can teach you how to do it, you can go to TM.org. What I like about it is that you're still allowed to have thoughts. You just allow the thoughts to flow and don't fight them when you're meditating. I never understood how people can have no thoughts. Sounds amazing but for someone like me, that's not realistic. So TM works best for me and you can do it anywhere. I also mentioned breathing. I didn't realize until I started looking into it more and researching it. But it's amazing how many people don't know how to breathe. Not in the sense of maintaining life. Of course we all breathe in order to stay alive but good, relaxing, fill your abdomen and expand your diaphragm breathing. I'm not good at. I used to take shallow breaths. Tense breaths. I still do but now, after working with physical therapists and functional medicine practitioners, I'm learning how to breathe properly and I'm much more aware of it. I often have to think about it though and check in with myself and my breathing. But at least I'm aware and checking in. It's amazing how some good belly breaths help calm your nerves, reset the brain and give you a moment when you feel like you're losing control or can't focus. And then lastly your mindset. Check in with your thoughts. Are you thinking how overwhelmed you are and how nervous you are about taking the exam? If so, be aware of that. Reframe it. When you're studying, instead of having the mindset of how overwhelmed you are, tell yourself how you're one step

closer to achieving your goals. What you tell yourself matters and it makes a big difference. So be aware of the things you're saying and thinking. This doesn't mean every thought needs to be positive. Life isn't easy so yes, you're gonna have frustrating moments, negative thoughts. But have them and learn to let them go so you can keep yourself focused on the task at hand and remember what you're trying to achieve. The point in all of these things is to be aware of how tense you are and put in the effort and focus on relaxation. Your mental capacity will improve and you will feel so much better and so much more focussed.

So let's talk a little about being organized. Organizing your thoughts, your tasks, your calendar helps you stay focused and clarifies your life a little. I'll speak from my own experience. When I feel there's so much stuff being thrown at me, I shut down. Things feel so overwhelming that I can't compartmentalize it. So I have to stay organized. Now, there are different levels of organized. I'm not talking about "Marie Kondo-ing" your life. Not against it. Sounds amazing. And I get the point. Don't have stuff around that adds chaos to your life. So I'm all for it. But the organization I'm talking about is the type of organized where you know what you need to study, you have an idea of how much time you'll need to review the information so you can stay on track, and you know when you're taking the exam. If you haven't scheduled your exam yet, please do it. So many people hold off feeling like they'll never be ready. But if you do that, you'll keep pushing it back. You'll never take that leap. It's scary. I get it. But you need to schedule the exam so you have an idea of how much time you have available to study. So when you're done listening to this podcast, if you haven't yet scheduled the exam, hop on the computer and schedule it. And if you need some encouragement, send me a DM on Instagram @jananichollrd and let me know you scheduled it so I can give you a little encouragement to keep going.

Lastly, you know your limits. You know when you're feeling overwhelmed and getting to a breaking point. So check in with yourself. Go out and do something social. Go for a coffee or tea or walk with a friend. Talk to a friend or family member who is supportive and encouraging. Someone who fills your cup. Someone who help keep your light shining bright and doesn't put you down or doesn't just agree with you when you're feeling doubtful and questioning yourself. You know who those people are in your life. So surround yourself with people who make you feel good and who encourage you to keep going.

Everyone has a different breaking point. Everyone studies differently. It's really easy to compare yourself to others. Some people can review material once and it sticks while others need to go over it several times. I was always in the last camp. I had to go over things a lot. I had to write things out. Read and re-read. Listen to my recorder, the only thing were were allowed in class and take notes. When I was in school, I was never the first person to turn in the exam. I wasn't the last either. I kinda lived in the middle group. My classmates would start turning in their exams one by one. I'd start getting nervous feeling like I must be doing bad if others were done

before me. But I wasn't failing. I just needed more time. I checked my answers and read and sometimes re-read the questions to make sure I was answering them correctly. I did well in school and I got good grades. But it's easy to compare and compare I did. I eventually got to the point where I could calm myself down when others would turn their exams in before me. I'd prepare myself for it to happen so when it did, it didn't bother me as much or make me feel like I was failing. So remember that we're all different. We study differently, we need to study for different amounts of time. Some people retain more information than others. Some people are more visual learners than others. There's no right or wrong way to be. Just be you. Do you. And don't worry about other people. You know what you need to do and where your breaking point is. If you know some people cram for days at home without taking breaks but you can't do it that way, then don't. Pay attention to yourself, your body, and do what you need to do for you.

And remember, you are the only person who can protect your mental health and prevent mental fatigue. When you feel yourself getting to the point of not feeling great and struggling to focus, that's a sign to stop what you're doing and think about giving yourself a break.

So let's do a quick review of some strategies to prevent mental fatigue. First create a study plan. It will look different for everybody. Create one that works for you. Get plenty of sleep and good quality sleep. Follow a healthy lifestyle which includes relaxation techniques to quiet and calm your mind so you can focus. Stay organized and lastly know your breaking point.

Remember to pay attention to what your body and mind are telling you. Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.