

When You're Doing Everything and Still Feel Behind

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Some days, you don't stop. You answer emails, get through meetings, make the appointment you've been putting off, pick up groceries, remember what someone needs for tomorrow, make dinner, and take care of a dozen little things in between. You got a lot done. But when you finally have a minute to sit down, your mind doesn't seem very interested in what you accomplished. Instead, it starts going through everything you didn't get to.

The email you still need to answer. The laundry that's still sitting there. The appointment you forgot to make. The thing you promised yourself you'd get done today. And before long, the thought shows up:

I should've gotten more done.

That feeling can be exhausting, especially when it happens day after day. You can spend the entire day being productive and still end it feeling like you're falling behind. So where does that feeling come from? Sometimes it isn't only the amount we have to do. It's also the expectations we're carrying about how much we think we should be able to do.

Pay attention to the “shoulds” and “musts”

Think about some of the thoughts that show up when you're busy or overwhelmed:

I should be able to keep up.
I should be more organized.

I shouldn't need help.
I need to get everything done before I can relax.

In Mind-Body Bridging® (MBB), these shoulds and musts are called Requirements. They're the rules and expectations we carry about ourselves, other people, and the way life should go. One of the important things to understand about Requirements is that they're ours. Your calendar didn't create the Requirement that you should be able to handle everything. Your unfinished laundry didn't decide you should be more organized. Those are expectations your I-System has turned into a Requirement, often without you even realizing it's happened. And some Requirements have been with us for so long that they don't feel like thoughts anymore. They simply feel true.

But *I should be able to keep up with everything* is still a thought. When life doesn't match that thought, our I-System can become overactive.

When “I'm behind” becomes something bigger

Maybe you don't get everything done today. That's the situation. But then your mind starts telling you what that means:

I'm so disorganized.
Why can't I get it together?
Everyone else seems to manage.
I'm failing.

In MBB, these negative messages we turn on ourselves are called Depressors. They often show up when we aren't meeting one of our Requirements. Now we're carrying the actual workload plus everything our I-System is adding to it.

There's a meaningful difference between I have several things I didn't get done today and I'm failing because I didn't get everything done today. One describes what happened. The other is a thought about what what happened means about us.

When the I-System is overactive, those thoughts can feel every bit as real as the situation itself. We may not even notice how quickly we moved from having unfinished tasks to judging ourselves because of them.

Notice where your mind is spending its time

Feeling behind also has a way of keeping our attention everywhere except where we actually are. We're answering one email while thinking about the next three. We're making dinner while worrying about tomorrow. We're sitting on the couch while mentally reviewing everything we didn't accomplish today.

Our body may be in one place while our mind is somewhere in the past or already moving into the future. That's a useful moment to simply notice:

My I-System is overactive.

You don't have to argue with the thoughts or tell yourself that your responsibilities don't matter. Instead, try Coming to Your Senses, one of the basic practices in MBB. Notice the sounds around you. Feel your feet against the floor. Notice the chair underneath you or what your hands are touching. Look around and take in what's actually in front of you.

You're not trying to clear your mind or force yourself to relax. You're simply bringing your attention back to where you actually are. Then ask yourself:

What actually needs my attention right now?

Not tomorrow's list. Not everything you didn't finish yesterday. Not all the things you could be doing. What's happening right now?

Natural Functioning may look different than you expect

As the I-System settles, we have greater access to what MBB calls Natural Functioning. Natural Functioning doesn't mean we're perfectly calm, never think about the past or future, or suddenly stop having responsibilities. It means we're more available to the present and better able to respond to what's actually happening, rather than being pulled around by every thought about what should be happening.

From that place, we may see our list a little differently. Maybe the next task really does need our attention. Maybe we realize we need help. Maybe something can wait until tomorrow. Maybe we've taken on more than one person can reasonably manage. Or maybe we notice the thought I should be doing more and recognize it for what it is: a

thought. It doesn't automatically require us to get back up and do more.

The responsibilities are still real. The list may still be there tomorrow. MBB doesn't ask us to pretend otherwise. It helps us notice how much additional stress our I-System may be adding to what is already a full life. And sometimes, when we come back to what's actually happening in the present, we realize we've done what we can for today.

Want to learn more?

If feeling behind has become your normal, MBB can help you start noticing the Requirements, Depressors, and other patterns that may be adding more stress to an already full life.

The MBB Clinic at Utah State University's I-System Institute offers [Utah residents up to 10 free individual sessions](#) with a trained practitioner. You can also join one of our [free four-week Building Resilience Through Mind-Body Bridging workshops](#), where you'll learn the basic MBB tools and practice using them in everyday life.

Whether you'd rather work one-on-one or learn alongside others, both are ways to begin understanding your own patterns and practicing tools you can use when life feels like too much.

The list probably won't ever be completely finished. That doesn't mean you're behind.