

## Ep #42: 5 Signs You're Leading to Study Burnout



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Sarah Michelle**

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hello, my friends, it's that time of year again where lots of you are graduating or you're about to graduate. And so it means it's almost time for you to take your board exam and finally become a real deal nurse practitioner after years of schoolwork, time sacrifices, and I am sure tons of clinical hours.

And while all that is so super exciting, I wanted to bring you this episode to make sure that you are taking the best care of you that you possibly can throughout this process. When you're preparing for your board exam, and likely finishing up some schoolwork, and trying to live a normal life, and a lot of you out there are also working simultaneously, it can be so easy to become overwhelmed as you just inadvertently overdo it.

And I know we've talked about burnout before on this podcast as a nurse and even as a practicing nurse practitioner. But something that we haven't discussed is studying burnout when you're getting ready to take that exam. It is a very real thing, as it is definitely something that I did myself. But studying burnout does not have to be part of your process.

The key thing here is being able to recognize that it's happening or about to happen, so that you can know it's time for a break, and to take some time for a little mental reset. And so today let's dedicate some time together to make sure that you're not overdoing it so that you can walk into that exam feeling as good and level-headed as humanly possible. That's always going to be our goal.

So sign number one that you're overdoing it is if you've completed three or more review courses. To the person out there that this rings true for, I know how overwhelming this is because I did it myself and almost instantly regretted it. You truly only need one or two sources to get prepared for boards. You do not have to or need to buy every review out there.

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When you do that, it opens up a can of worms that feels as if it can never be closed. You're going to be receiving information from so many different angles and so many different perspectives, at a certain point it all just seems to mush together. And suddenly you're studying feels like a big, jumbled mess. If you ever feel jumbled, you're overdoing it.

What we need to remember when it comes to preparing for boards is something that I've said before, and it's that board preparation is the icing on the cake on top of nurse practitioner school. Preparing for boards is supposed to solidify the knowledge that you have already learned and applied during school so that you can then adequately demonstrate your competency for the exam.

You have all the material that you need from your nurse practitioner school education and now let's use board preparation materials as a way to tie all of that together with some simple memory tools and helpful extra explanations.

I know some of you out there do not always feel strong in your core knowledge after school, but that is typically a confidence issue and not a material issue. And if that is you, board preparation should serve as a way to be your ultimate confidence booster before you ever walk into that exam.

And so as sign number one, if you've already bought several materials, give each of them a small snippet of a try. And then pick the two that feel the most aligned with you and your habits for studying. That is a great place to start to rein that overwhelm back in and get yourself on some more solid footing.

Sign number two that you're overdoing it is if you suddenly have had a massive drop in your scores on practice questions. I find this happens a lot with students who do more than 3,000 practice questions. You think, "Okay, the more practice questions I do, the better my scores will be." And for some students who do this gradually over time, that can be the case.

But if you're a student out there trying to do that many practice questions in the last two weeks before your exam, I often find that scores drop because

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your brain is so overwhelmed. We always want quality of studying over quantity of studying.

If you're slamming your brain every day with practice question, after practice question, after practice question with no breaks and no end in sight, suddenly that content that you have always known so well and always get correct starts to become muddled with the stuff that you don't know as well. That's when those scores start to drop, which can be a major hit to your confidence.

And so if you find yourself doing practice questions and not getting the scores that you have been previously, or even better than those scores, take that as a gentle nudge to stop what you're doing, assess yourself, assess where you're at mentally, and take a break.

It is so easy to fall into a rat race trying to do as much as you can for as long as you can before testing. But that really affects your ability in the end to be successful because your anxiety is going to be so darn hard because of it.

So since we just mentioned breaks, sign number three that you're overdoing it is if you do not have any break days planned out in your study calendar or you literally just can't remember the last time you took a break. Sometimes students feel like if they take a break, they're somehow going to lose some momentum with their studying plan. It's actually quite the opposite.

Taking breaks allows you to be more present when you're studying so you can have better results faster with all this material that you're trying to take in as you prepare for the exam. I want you to hear me loud and clear right now, there is never any shame in taking a break. Not one little bit, not even an ounce. Not even if you had a whole day of studying planned and you get an hour into it and you're just not in the right head space. Go ahead, take that mental break.

Pushing ahead without breaks is depleting your gas tank so fast. When instead you can rest, you can fuel up again to show up even better for that

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next go round of studying. If you've been overdoing it in this way, no big deal, but let's pull out that calendar today and add in those mental bright days in advance for the rest of your studying plan.

I truly like for my students to have this break time planned. Number one, it holds you accountable to doing it so you can't forget. And number two, it gives you that little mental reprieve to look forward to as that time comes up. You deserve these breaks, so please be sure to take them.

Now sign number four that you're overdoing it is if you have spent over two to three months truly dedicated to studying. Truly dedicated means that you have done plenty of practice questions, you've been consistently studying material from courses, and you are all in on your studying plan day to day.

I find that most people who fall into this overdoing it category are those who are a little bit more anxious. They keep thinking that by doing more and studying for longer they will finally receive a magical song that they are ready to test. And while I wish this were true, you will likely never feel 100% ready, even if you study for an entire year.

If this is you ask yourself, "Do I really need to keep preparing? Do I know enough of my content to show that I will be competent as a brand new nurse practitioner?" Only you can answer these questions. But if this has been your pattern, it may be worth pushing that testing date up as soon as possible.

This, of course comes with a caveat that you're scoring well on practice questions and that you have truly been dedicated to those courses. But if both of those pieces are in place, let's consider moving that testing date up and getting this exam behind you so that you can officially become the real deal.

I know the anxiety is so real surrounding these exams, but remember from the beginning, board prep should just be that final stepping stone and not a step that we are hung up on for months on end. The longer you push it out, the more amped up you end up becoming about taking that exam and

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ultimately, the harder it is to actually get yourself to the testing center to take the thing.

And lastly here, sign number five that you might be overdoing it is if your anxiety is so high that you're having some panic level symptoms. Panic level means you're not sleeping, you've lost your appetite, maybe even you're having true panic attacks. I know before my board exam I was having panic attacks what seemed like daily. And no matter what preparation materials I used, I still was really amped all the time.

And so I just kept doing more, and more, and more, thinking it would fix that underlying anxiety. And I'm sad to be the bearer of bad news if this is you because it didn't squash my anxiety. My anxiety only seemed to get worse, because I was keeping myself and my brain so incredibly wound up at all times preparing.

So if you've started your board prep with some anxiety that has now turned into monster anxiety as I so affectionately like to describe it, what has happened in the in between and how can we mitigate that gap before you walk into your exam?

This is definitely a time I like to encourage students to think about reaching out to their primary care provider to see if there's anything additional that we can have on board for exam day if needed because it is so incredibly difficult to pass these exams if these panic level symptoms come through on your big exam day just for the sheer fact it skews your focus, and you get flustered. Then when you're flustered even the easy exam questions start seeming difficult because everything in your brain starts running together.

And so here's the thing, y'all, were you doing one of these signs, two of these signs, maybe three or more of these signs? Take a big deep breath, you haven't been doing anything wrong. But what you have now is the knowledge to make some changes, and knowledge is power.

The whole purpose of this episode is to bring light to some things I have commonly seen students do and give the power back to you through

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awareness, so that you can have an even better opportunity for exam success. Overdoing it is tough on our brains, it's tough on your overall mental health, it really starts to blur things. So you end up struggling with exam day clarity.

But by making some simple changes, like adding in a break day or two, or deciding to focus in on just two courses if you bought several, et cetera, you can change your trajectory for yourself for that big exam day. That's the whole goal of this podcast, it's the whole goal of the courses I offer, our Facebook community, the whole shebang. All of these things are here together for you to get yourself in the best spot possible to pass this exam and truly become a real deal nurse practitioner.

So if you've been out there overdoing it, I'm giving you a virtual hug right now and letting you know that it's okay to slow down that pace a little bit. And ultimately, give yourself some grace. You have been working so hard to get to this point and now it's almost finally here. And I want you to have your best opportunity to make this goal of yours a true reality. But I'll get off my soapbox for now. I'm sending you all my love, all of my virtual hugs, and I'll chat with you guys next week.

As an extra bonus, friends, if you're looking for support no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit [stressfreenp.com](http://stressfreenp.com). See you next week.