

Ep #47: How to Get Your Holiday Study Back on Track



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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.

Hey, hey, my friends. Today I felt it was the perfect time to release an episode all about holiday studying. Some of you out there might be thinking right now, "Sara, why didn't you release this episode weeks ago? The big holiday for a lot of us is this week." And yes, I get that, but this episode is for those of you out there that may have lost your way during the holiday season.

It can be such a lofty goal to know that you're graduating in November, December, or even January and try to squeeze board preparation into your life when you're likely still working and you have all of these extra things to tend to like holiday parties, family get togethers, shopping for gifts, et cetera.

Suddenly, your big plans to test before the end of the year can start to fall to the wayside and all of the sudden it's the middle of January before you're getting caught back up to speed. So let's spend this episode working together to figure out how you can reroute your studying plans to survive this holiday season and become the real deal.

I want to validate for you that however you're feeling right now is totally okay. And no matter what your holiday studying plan has been like, we can get you back on track. And I'll give you my biggest caution for post-holiday studying too at the end of this episode of a very dark trap that you want to be sure that you do not fall into.

First up, when it comes to studying during a big holiday season is dialing back on any guilt and or obligation that you may be feeling. This giant rush of holidays, and family time, and time with friends only tends to come once a year for a lot of us. And it can be so easy to become your own worst internal critic.

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You might find yourself standing at a family gathering and thinking, “Why didn’t I just stay home and finish a few more practice questions?” Or “Why didn’t I just finish up that course video I was watching?” And I want to start with this tip because if you are making yourself feel bad about your studying habits and your level of commitment two things are happening.

Number one, you are most definitely not able to make the most of the holidays with your family, which absolutely stinks. But number two, the more that you beat yourself up internally like that, it actually makes it harder for you to get back into a solid studying groove again.

I know that sounds a little counterintuitive, but I see it happen with students all the time. They berate themselves about their studying plans, and this applies to more than just during the holidays, and they make themselves feel so down and out that when it comes time to study again they automatically want to avoid it altogether because they feel as if what they are doing must not be good enough.

It is a nasty, negative thought loop to get stuck in and then all of a sudden it’s three months after graduation, or even longer than that, and they still haven’t set a testing date for themselves. So if you find yourself doing this, the important piece here is truly the mental awareness that you’re doing it. This is something I actively work on every single day.

When I hear that negative little self-critic start up in my brain I bring awareness to it that what it’s saying is not actually reality and I meet myself right then and there with some self-compassion. And I promise y’all, even something as simple as that can make a world of difference for you enjoying your holidays instead of beating yourself up all along the way until the big season is over.

Next up is most definitely going to be determining your priorities. And this is truly going to look different for everyone. For me, if I had a big board exam hanging over my head I think it would be really difficult to enjoy any of my holiday season because I know myself as a person and I can tend to easily become a little bit all consumed.

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For some of you out there family time during the holidays is going to be your ultimate priority above all else, and most definitely studying. So where do you land on the spectrum? Because once you decide your priorities, you can make a decision about how to map out your holiday plans without feeling like you're slacking on something.

For a lot of you out there listening to this episode, I have a feeling that you likely fall in the second category where friends, family, and celebration come first. And this is totally okay because you have worked so hard to get to a point where you're about to graduate from school or you just graduated and so you can definitely set your priorities in a way that will allow you that time and flexibility during this big season.

My biggest piece of guidance for those of you out there waiting post-holiday to get started is actually to go ahead and set a testing date. The reason behind this is that it will ideally give you some momentum and some drive to pick things up again and get going once your holiday season is over.

Most students who run into post-holiday problems are those who actually don't get restarted again once the season is over. That's when I find students dragging out their board exams for months and months post their graduation. Having that set date and truly that finish line in view can be critical to getting the exam behind you.

And just as a mental heads up you typically only have 120 days after your application is accepted to take your exam anyways. And so this can really serve two purposes, motivation, but also not having to pay to apply to test again when we all know these tests can be expensive.

So then when you get back into the groove of things again, the best way to dive back into studying during a big holiday season will sound simple, but it's actually harder than it may seem. And it is just the fact that you do not want to over commit yourself.

Guys, it's so, so easy to do. You have this lofty goal that maybe you're going to test a month after Christmas and you're going to study five to eight hours every day leading up to that big exam. On top of this you're going to

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go to every holiday function and you're also going to work full time somehow. It's simply too much. Even if you're fortunate enough to not have to work and just focus on studying.

When you over commit yourself to your studying plan you open yourself up to a lot of disappointment because you'll either consistently find yourself not holding yourself accountable, or you'll burn yourself out studying so hard for so long that a decent chunk of your studying time is ultimately wasted.

Be patient with yourself, don't overdo it and try as hard as you possibly can, I know this one is difficult for me, but try as hard as you can to be realistic. Even a couple hours a day of dedicated studying and practice questions can be plenty.

I know that burnout can be a buzz word in the nursing world, but it's a definite reality that we want to avoid if we can. Students who walk into their exams burnt out and exhausted are so much more likely to get flustered, anxious, and ultimately not be successful in their exams. And so don't let this be you, take the breaks you need and don't over commit. Be honest with yourself and set a realistic plan.

And this kind of segues me into my next major point for some post-holiday studying. And for this one I want you to hear me loud and clear, do not cram. If you try to cram for your exam I can promise you it's probably going to come back to haunt you.

I hate to be this way, I hate to ever be negative on the podcast, but I have consistently found there are typically two buckets of students who fail their exams on the first try. Either A, they didn't have an anxiety plan, which is a totally different conversation and that's okay. Or they try to cram for their board exam. And so don't let this be you.

Don't convince yourself that you can start studying the day after the holiday ends and take your boards by the new year. You can try to do that, but you're going to be stressed, you're going to be overwhelmed, and you're probably going to be doubting yourself the entire way through.

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You really want to walk into your exam feeling level-headed and prepared. That way when you get a tough question, and those tough questions are inevitably going to come, you're not going to fall apart because you'll have that preparation that you've completed backing you up.

I know cramming can be so tempting as a solution to enjoying your holidays and knocking out your board exam right after, but it's going to be an expensive choice if so. You'll be paying to retest again, you're going to be paying for more board review materials, and possibly even contact hours to get eligibility to retest. It's just not worth it. Do not fall in this black hole, do not cram. Okay?

And lastly, a huge way to get yourself in the groove of holiday or post-holiday studying is to turn to those around you and ask for that support when you need it. You likely did not make it through nurse practitioner school alone and now it is time to call on that support system of yours to help you through your board preparation time as well.

It could be as simple as your spouse helping you limit distractions or a friend taking care of an errand for you. Maybe even having a babysitter coming for an extra couple of hours. Whatever it is that will allow you to focus on your studying and what needs to be accomplished so that you can take your exam and become a real deal nurse practitioner.

I think it is so easy during the holidays to want to be everywhere all the time and do all the things for everyone that you love, but we also have to be able to take some time for ourselves and what we need as well. We are human too, okay? And I know this is something that can be so difficult to do, but leaning on your support system will allow you to have the space and time you need to get this exam behind you so that everyone who needs you can have you full time again when you pass.

Sometimes it feels like when you're studying for boards you're only half there in the real world. And so the sooner you can become a real deal nurse practitioner it will benefit not only you, but everyone around you, your

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entire support system. You're going to be happier and they're going to be happier too. It's a win win all the way around when you pass.

And so to tie up this episode I want to say to you to not be so dang hard on yourself. That's what it really boils down to when it comes to holiday or post-holiday studying. I know that we all want to do it all, I feel that to my core. But if we can evaluate our priorities and incorporate our studying timeline into those, we will be much better served than burning ourselves out on both ends.

And if you find yourself in a bind after the holidays and you find yourself desperately wanting to cram and get the exam over with, please hear from my heart to yours that is not the way to go about your board preparation. Please give yourself the time and the space to do the work and preparation needed to be successful instead of gambling with yourself and your future career. That's what you're doing when you're cramming and then taking the test, you're gambling.

You have worked so hard to even get to this point so let's not complicate the process by testing when you know that you're likely not ready yet. And above all else, no matter what holidays you celebrate or don't celebrate, I am sending you all out there the warmest wishes and holiday joy during this season.

Don't forget to take the time that you need to enjoy it and just be human. You deserve it, I absolutely promise. I know there can be so much pressure this time of year but I'm here for you and I know that you can pass this exam when the time is right. And that's it for this week, guys. I'll talk to you 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.

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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. See you next week.