

Ep #48: Studying When Sick



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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.

Hello, my friends. I thought it was only fitting to do an episode on studying while sick because if you can't tell from my congested voice— Which if you can, I'm impressed, I've tried really hard to cover it up. I'm a little under the weather myself this week.

There's so many of you, though, that end up being either acutely sick or possibly even worse while finishing up school. Because I get your feedback, and messages and emails all the time about how to get yourselves going again when the time comes and you're actually feeling better.

Being sick is just a part of life. And whether it's a head cold, like I currently have, or maybe the flu, or first trimester sickness, because that one seems to pop up a lot in this season of life for a lot of you. Or something that even lingers a little bit longer, there are some solid things that I want to tell you to help you on your journey to still becoming a real deal nurse practitioner.

Whenever I'm sick and I'm trying to get something accomplished, even just the accomplishment of writing this podcast episode for example, I just view it as a roadblock that I need to find a way to maneuver around. And I capitalize on some things that I know are going to get me through, which is what we're going to be talking about in this episode today.

So first up when it comes to being sick, we have to pause and give ourselves just a little bit of grace. I think this is maybe what I struggle with the most. But I really think we have to address the mental warfare of being sick first before we discuss real management.

I know so many of us out there get so accustomed to the grind, day in and day out, and even the thought of taking a little break can make us type A personality types shudder. But I want to give you guys some guidance I got

[Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner Podcast](#) with Sarah Michelle

Ep #48: Studying When Sick

recently that I've really found myself coming back to again and again. Now, this isn't totally related to being sick, but I promise I'm going to loop this back around, and it's a thought that I've been using a lot while being sick myself this week.

I was talking with a business mentor of mine, who also happens to be a therapist, which what an awesome combination that is. And I was telling her I get really anxious when I'm not able to go full speed. Like whenever I'm getting a little burnt out and overwhelmed and need to just mentally take a step back or even a full mental health day.

So she asked me what percent do you feel like you can give of yourself on those days when that happens? And I said, well probably at my best, maybe 40% whenever I feel like that. And she said if 40% is what you have available to give, then that is you giving your all.

And I was honestly a little confused, I had to think about it for a minute. But she said if that's literally all that you have, you are giving it your all. People can't ask for more from you than your all.

So when I've been sick this week, or if you've been sick and trying to get through board preparation, which is a doozy even without being a little under the weather. If you find that little inner self critic coming to berate you about not doing enough, remind yourself if you're only capable of doing 40% of what you intended today, then you're giving it your all already.

There's no need to guilt or shame yourself. There will be days in the future where 100% will be back available to you, or at least somewhere close depending on the situation. And so we just have to maneuver until that time comes, and that my friends is 1,000% okay.

So now that we have the mental piece out of the way, let's discuss some tactical items for making it through those sick time blues when you need or want to study for your exam. I want to start off our tactical tips with a super important one, which is if you are feeling super bad it is actually one of the only times I will ever suggest rescheduling your exam.

Ep #48: Studying When Sick

I'm very much a stickler about picking an exam date and sticking to it. I think it's really important, I think it gives you that motivation and drive to keep you studying and preparing. But your exam really needs you to show up as your best possible self. Because when you're not feeling your best and your thinking is all muddled it can put you in a really difficult position to try and pass.

I've had way too many students try to push through, not only being sick, but also some really terrible life situations. And I promise y'all, it's not worth it, even if your authorization to test is about to expire. Most students don't know this, but you could typically call and address your situation with them directly to try to get an extension to get you over the hump. So don't let that authorization to test sway your decision making.

If you don't feel up to testing, then don't test, it's that simple. If you decide to test anyways then the problem becomes there's no way to determine what your root issue was if you fail. Was it being sick? Was it content knowledge? Was it anxiety, et cetera? All of that becomes really confusing because you needed every piece in place to pass.

Once you've got that testing date handled and ideally postponed, if need be, how do we tackle the reality now of trying to study when you're not your normal self? Of course, if at all possible, for example if you have something a little bit more short lived like the flu, take some true time off. Time spent studying when you have the flu and under the influence of cold medications and exhaustion is likely studying time wasted.

But if you have something that's going to be hanging around for a little bit longer, like that first trimester sickness we were talking about, then you really need to strategize that studying time. What times a day do you feel your best? If that varies day to day, how could you rearrange your schedule to accommodate when you do have that momentary glimpse of feeling good?

Ep #48: Studying When Sick

Let's capitalize on those moments as much as we can. When you're in this boat of being sick, some studying will be better than none at all and so breaking everything down into bite sized segments is going to be super helpful. And this approach is actually what I suggest students do who are totally normal feeling and have totally normal health, because overdoing studying can be just as bad as not studying enough.

Alongside figuring out yourself and your best schedule to squeeze that studying time in, we also need for you to prioritize taking care of yourself and your needs. I know this piece of guidance always feel so intuitive, but if you're sick and you're running on fumes, even when you get that free hour to study, it's going to be difficult to really maintain and ingrain that information like you're going to need to.

So make sure you're staying hydrated, that you're remembering to eat. Truly that you're meeting all those basic human needs that for some reason we try to overlook sometimes. When those needs are met, then let's take a look at what tasks or responsibilities that you can offload until you're back to feeling better.

It could be something as simple as ordering takeout instead of cooking dinner. You don't even necessarily have to depend on another person per se. But if you do have a really great support system in your life, and I know so many of you out there do, this is a wonderful time to lean into them and be really open and honest.

I'm very direct with my husband, Ben. I tell him, "Hey, today, all I have is 40%. So if you could help me with A or B, I would really greatly appreciate it." And even the simple things go a long way where they're taken care of by your support team. So offload what you can until you're ready to take everything back on 100% again.

Something that has worked well for me in the past, and there was actually a finals week when I was in undergrad where I had mono, so this is

Ep #48: Studying When Sick

something that I've really put into execution, is to change up my study location.

It can be so tempting when you're studying to study from the bed or the couch, to cozy up and all of a sudden you find yourself napping instead of studying. We've all done it. But if you really need to jump back on your studying bandwagon to get this thing behind you, then maybe try studying at the kitchen table instead.

And if you're feeling well enough, maybe you go to a coffee shop or a local library. Even if you only have an hour in you to study, that hour can be so much more meaningful and intentional when you're not slouched in bed, despite how tempting that is.

Sometimes too, a little geographical change can boost your spirits and make you feel a little closer to normal again. Every step towards feeling 100% makes a difference, even if that step is taking a shower for the day and sitting at your kitchen table to get your work done with the energy you have available to you.

And lastly, guys, don't overdo it. Something I am so guilty of is I get to the end of a head cold or the flu and I start to think, "You know, I don't feel that bad. I'm just going to go back to life as normal." And it almost always kicks me in the butt when I do. Same goes for your studying practices too. If you're having a great day where you're feeling closer to normal, you're almost over the hump, that's awesome but let's not spend nine hours that day try to study.

When you're getting over being sick, you need to find a way to adequately ease yourself back into your routine. If you hit the ground running just like you would any other day, that fuel take yours is going to deplete pretty quickly, which will leave you waiting even longer to actually fully recover.

Your body needs the time and the space to do the healing work, and it needs it, it needs for you to allow it to do so. I know that's the hard part. And I know that all of us have commitments, responsibilities, and truly life

Ep #48: Studying When Sick

itself to tend to, but delaying the healing process just delays your capabilities even further to handle all those things.

And so truly, the root of this podcast is ultimately this simple fact, take care of yourself. Only you and your body will know the key things that you need to make it through a sickness. And hopefully if you're listening to this episode, you're just going through a short-term thing that's going to resolve soon.

It can be so tough to be sick and try to prepare for boards. So please, please, please be sure that you're not being too hard on yourself about what you are or are not capable of during this time. A key part to passing boards is taking care of you, because ultimately at the end of the day, you're the one that has to go into the exam and prove your knowledge base.

No one else can take better care of you than you and you know what you need to do in order to get yourself back together again. And if you're out there listening and you're sick too right now, this is my gentle nudge to you to take today off if you need it, maybe even tomorrow too. The studying will always be there waiting for you, so don't try to rush to get back to it until you're ready. You have time and space to heal and then study. But that's it for this week, guys. I'll talk to you soon.

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. See you next week.