80/20 Rule

Burnout: Finding the Few Things That Matter Most

The 80/20 rule says that a small share of causes often leads to a large share of the results. Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto showed in the 1890s that a small share of people held a large share of the income and wealth in the places he studied. Quality expert Joseph Juran later named the pattern after him, so it is also called the Pareto principle. The numbers are a rough rule of thumb and rarely come out exactly. Still, the idea can help you spot the few things that give you the most energy and the few that drain you the most.

1 Track a typical week

For one week, or from memory, list the activities that fill your days. Rate how each one usually leaves you feeling, from -2 (drained) to +2 (refreshed).

Activity	Hours a week	Rating (-2 to +2)	Who or what it is for
Answering work messages after 8 p.m.	*5*	*-2*	*Work*
Walking the dog	*3*	*+1*	*Me and the dog*

Why does this work? *When you are stressed, everything can feel equally heavy, and that makes it hard to know where to start. Looking for the few activities with the biggest effect, good or bad, points you to the changes most likely to help. It also reminds you that you do not have to fix everything at once.*

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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2 Find your vital few

Look back at your list. Circle the two or three activities that lift you the most and the two or three that wear you down the most. Look for patterns, such as certain people, times of day, or kinds of tasks.

The few that give me the most energy	The few that drain me the most

3 Shift your balance

One draining activity I could cut, shorten, share, or change:

Example: Turn off work notifications at 7 p.m. on weeknights

One energizing activity I will protect or do more often:

Who could help me make this change?

4 Look back

After two weeks, what difference did the change make?

If most of your week feels draining no matter what you change, you may be dealing with burnout or low mood. A therapist can help you sort out what is going on.

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