

IT WAS ALWAYS EMBARRASSING
WHEN THEY SHOUTED 'LITTLE
MISS BUSIER THAN YOU' OUT
AT STARBUCKS...



STOP

**YOU ARE NOT TOO
BUSY TO READ THIS!**

Juggling multiple projects at work and home, rushing from festival to wedding... When did being busy become such a badge of honour? And just how frantic are we really?

WORDS: SERENA KUTCHINSKY
ILLUSTRATION: ROGER AND ADAM HARGREAVES



So, how are you today? Busy, you say? Tell us something we don't know. Right now, ask that question to any group of women and you'll no doubt find yourself in the midst of a busy-off, an ever-increasing volley of "So frantic!", "I've been manic!", "Totally slammed!", flying across the room. But then you haven't got time to stop and chat, have you? You're too goddamn busy...

When did we become so determined to be the busiest of all? Because despite the explosion of the wellness industry and all our talk of self-care and mindfulness, the majority of us are still slavish devotees to the cult of busy. We might roll our eyes as we tell tales of 'manic' weekends racing from a wedding to a festival, or sigh dramatically as we recount training for a 10K alongside starting a business, yet – let's be honest – there's often a tinge of smugness amidst our protestations at how much we've had to pack in. Keen to understand our motivations, we ran a reader survey to examine how the busy epidemic affects everything from our self-esteem to stress levels. And the results were telling. In fact, 40% of *Stylist* readers said they secretly thought women who don't have a busy lifestyle



are "lazy or not very motivated". Busy, it seems, truly is the modern status symbol.

It hasn't always been like this. In the Eighties, when greed was good, we aspired to be financially independent enough to have a good chunk of leisure time – to pamper ourselves with expensive facials and long holidays. In contrast, today the greatest kudos seems to go to those who have the least free time. Sucked into a culture of 'busy bragging', the majority of *Stylist* readers saw themselves as at least 50% busier than their friends, with most saying it's because they want to be seen as "having it all" – juggling work, fitness, networking, cooking and socialising (extra points for all in one day). And if we have a relatively free diary for a while? Well, as 40% of you admitted, that makes us secretly worried – am I no longer popular, needed, wanted?

"Being busy makes us appear like superwomen," says lifestyle coach Meg Dennison. "It seems like an indicator of our

importance in the world. But think of all those people you see scurrying around sighing about how much they have to do. Often they aren't actually accomplishing anything, they just want to look like martyrs."

In truth, we're wasting so much energy rushing around trying to be Little Miss Busy that we're risking our health. In our survey, a shocking 53% of you admitted to cancelling a doctor's appointment because you were "too busy to go", while 36% reported that while you were leading a full life, you were too exhausted to enjoy it. And then there's that other uncomfortable truth – the "b" word has also become a way of covering-up poor time management, or avoiding tricky issues in our personal lives (how many times have you hung up the phone mid-row claiming to be "too busy for this right now?") as well as feeding our own egos as we strive to have purpose in a competitive world.

So, are we all claiming busy status, while secretly wasting two hours a night on Instagram? Or has it just become a stock response – the modern version of "fine" – that we trot out without thinking what we really mean by it? Here, four super busy women share an average week with us, before time management guru Laura Vanderkam analyses just how busy they really are.

The side-hustler



Iris Andrews, 30, from east London, is a climate campaign strategist and trainee yoga teacher. She also runs quarterly nature courses and volunteers at a homeless shelter. She classes herself as 7/10 on the busy scale



Monday: I'm up at 6.30am doing 30 minutes of yoga. I check Facebook over breakfast, then cycle to work and spend two hours planning my week – Google Calendar is my lifeline. I'm in meetings until 5pm when I meet a contact for coffee. At home, I take an 8pm call with our LA office and go to sleep at 10.45pm.

Tuesday: I'm at the homeless shelter from 6.30am until 8.30am then do my yoga practice

in a park. When that slips, my anxiety kicks in and I feel overwhelmed. I'm in the office until 6pm but book annual leave at lunch to prepare for my yoga exams. I go home via the supermarket – my husband and I are babysitting for a friend who recently lost his wife and we cook some meals to stock his freezer. We're home by 11.30pm.

Wednesday: I'm up early to catch an 8.30am flight to New York. I work on a presentation on the plane and go straight to the office to confront my inbox. I collapse into bed exhausted at 7pm.

Thursday: I break one of my rules and stay in the office until 8pm. I used to work late all the time but it left me feeling constantly overwhelmed.

After meeting a friend and going to a gig briefly, I slope off.

Friday: Today is presentation day. After a final debrief I download some yoga reading and grab a cocktail with a colleague before heading to the airport for 7pm. On the flight I devise next weekend's nature excursion and draft emails to the group.

Saturday: I do chores, check the shelter rota and email the other volunteers. Friends say I'm crazy busy but my life is more balanced than a few years ago. We meet friends in the pub at 3pm and stay for the evening. I really missed time with friends when planning our wedding last month. And taking my foot off the gas at work was odd as I've always been ambitious. It made me realise you can still be successful working normal hours.

Sunday: A morning yoga class, then brunch and a long walk. Later, I do my yoga homework and plan activities for my nature group. It was my new year's resolution to cut down my side-projects to make more time for my partner and friends but I've failed to stick to it. I stop at 5pm for some downtime. I love watching a movie on Sunday night but have no idea how people fit in box sets.

Laura's verdict: Iris is amazing at time management and busier than she gives herself credit for. She clearly prioritises what matters to her, and fitting in high quality use of her free time plus international travel is impressive.

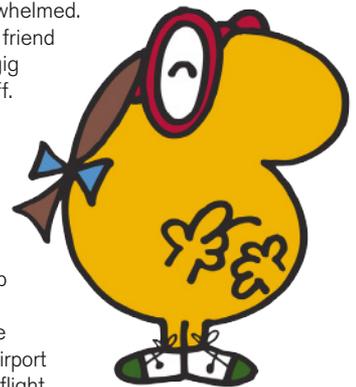
Laura's busy rating: 8/10

The entrepreneur



Alice Bentinck, 31, is a tech entrepreneur, educator and blogger. She lives in east London and rates herself as 10/10 on the busy scale

Monday: I'm up at 7.30am and do a yoga video for 30 minutes. My life hack is that I cycle everywhere: it shortens my commute and means I get two hours of exercise a day. I'm in meetings from 9.30am until 6pm but we're religious about eating lunch together as a company so I take



a break from 12pm to 1pm. I do an hour of desk work and head home. My boyfriend, Tom, cooks while I sort laundry. There's time for an episode of *Veep* before bed at 11pm.

Tuesday: Up at 6.30am for a breakfast meeting. The day passes in a blur of calls and meetings. At 3pm, I find out that the speaker for tonight's event I'm hosting has cancelled so we scramble to find someone else. I do my make-up in five minutes before it starts at 6pm. There are drinks after, but I don't drink during the week – even a glass of wine stops me sleeping properly. Home at 10.30pm, I flick through Facebook before bed. I try to only check it once a day.

Wednesday: Tom and I do hot yoga together at 7am and reward ourselves with scrambled eggs. I cook in the mornings because I don't have much time in the evenings. From 2pm I'm out speaking to politicians about women in tech. In the evening I give a presentation. I cycle home on a high – I thrive on being this busy. I work 55 hours a week but being able to work hard on something I love is my dream.

Thursday: Another early breakfast meeting, then a call with the Singapore office at 8am. I snack on biscuits and message my best friend between meetings and arrange to see her on Saturday. The thought of relaxing at the weekend is what keeps me going. I don't get home until 8pm. I've brought some reading home



and try to get through it while Tom cooks. He wants to book a hotel for a wedding we're going to but I'm distracted. We're in bed by 11pm but chat for 20 minutes before sleep.

Friday: The day starts with an 8am debrief with my business partner. At 6pm we crack out the drinks in the office. I just make it to my 7.15pm yoga class and don't get home until 9pm so I order a takeaway as I'm leaving. We eat in front of the television. By 11pm I'm falling asleep.

Saturday: I get my nails done and treat myself to a massage. Tom is out with friends so I cook dinner for my girlfriend – we drink wine and chat until 1am.

Sunday: After brunch we go for a two-hour cycle ride, have coffee and read the papers. At 4pm I try to do some work reading, but end up snoozing on the sofa. Tom and I make dinner

together. I read a book for 30 minutes and get an early night.

Laura's verdict:

Alice is busy with work and clearly enjoys it but like many of us perhaps underestimates the free moments she has. She is honest about the fact that weekends are ring-fenced for relaxing and makes smart choices about her downtime. She is an example of someone living a positive, busy lifestyle.

Laura's busy rating: 7/10

The flexi-timer



Angelica Ronald, 38, is a professor and mother of three children. She lives in north London and rates herself as 9/10 on the busy scale

Monday: My husband, Josh, is away so I get up at 7.30am and wake the kids. The school bags are already by the front door, breakfast is laid out. I'm better in the evenings so I'd rather run around after midnight than be up at 6am. I try to cook a decent breakfast then do the school run. On the Tube to work I make my weekly to-do list. The day feels short and rushed because I need to be home for 6pm for dinner with the kids.

“I HAVE TWO CLEANERS. A FEMALE COLLEAGUE ONCE TOLD ME THAT THROWING MONEY AT HOUSEWORK IS THE KEY TO SURVIVING WORKING LIFE”

After the kids are in bed, I unwind with a glass of wine and an episode of *The Trip*.

Tuesday: I'm working from home so put the laundry on before a call at 10am. At lunch I go to the gym for an hour. I justify it by thinking of the time I saved commuting. One of my cleaners arrives – I have two on different days. A female colleague once told me that throwing money at housework is the key to surviving working life. If everything is organised it helps me relax. My parents collect the kids from school but I stay in my study and work until 6pm.

Wednesday: Working from home again. I check Twitter over lunch and go for a quick walk to clear my head. After school pick-up I take the rest of the afternoon off to play in the garden – I probably spend 16 hours a week playing with the children. I don't check my email when I'm not working but I send Josh pictures of the kids. I always try to keep energy in reserve for emergencies by not mixing work and home life. A few years ago my little girl broke her leg when Josh was away: that was tough.



Thursday: I race from my office to an evening lecture then meet a friend for dinner. I use the 45-minute taxi home to prepare for tomorrow's seminars. I get in at 11pm and have a glass of wine with Josh, who's back. We go to bed at midnight.

Friday: I catch up on new research on the Tube. Today will be busy and I need to pick up presents for two kids' birthday parties as well. I'm dreading it but it's the price I pay for my afternoon with the kids. I get off the Tube early to squeeze in some exercise. Josh makes dinner but we don't get the kids to bed until 9pm. I have friends whose children are snoozing by 7pm but they're up at 5am. There's just time to watch a movie before collapsing.

Saturday: It's a hectic day of birthday parties, football practice and home-cooked meals. I do the food shop and go out with Josh for dinner.

Sunday: Friends come over for lunch and stay all day. Then the kids watch TV and I do some drawing – being creative helps me switch off.

Laura's verdict: **With three children and a husband who is often away, Angelica works hard at managing her energy levels by keeping work and home life separate. She never describes herself as exhausted which given how much she is juggling is an accolade to her.**

Laura's busy rating: 9/10



WEARING THE SAME SHOES EVERY DAY IS THE ULTIMATE TIME SAVER

The corporate high flyer



Briony Clarke, 31 is a solicitor and the UK's youngest female judge. She lives in Essex and rates herself as 9/10 on the busy scale

Monday: I'm due in court 80 miles away at 9am so I'm out of the house by 7am. I spend about 12 hours travelling a week. I try not to worry about the 200 emails that will be waiting for me later. Luckily, the case is over quickly and I eat a sandwich while driving back. At the office, I answer emails and calls until 7pm. Dinner is a ready meal in front of the TV. I have a glass of wine to relax but I'm still thinking about work,

"ON SATURDAY I HEAD TO THE OFFICE AS USUAL TO GET ON TOP OF NEXT WEEK'S CASES - IT'S EASIER TO WORK WHEN IT'S EMPTY"

and I check my emails and send a few holding messages. I even sneak a final peek in bed.

Tuesday: Juggling urgent work with 30 ongoing cases is stressful. I put everything on a whiteboard which helps. At lunch, I scroll through Facebook to remind myself there is a world outside the law. I leave the office at 5pm and get a train to London for drinks with other female lawyers, answering more emails on the way. I wish I could just switch off but it's essential catch-up time. I love sleeping but never get enough. I'm in bed by 11.30pm but lie there making a mental to-do list for tomorrow.

Wednesday: I have four deadlines so my headphones are on all day. Being promoted to partner has increased the pressure on me. It's family dinner night at my dad's - I cancelled last week due to exhaustion so make the effort to be there this week and leave at 7pm.

Thursday: I walk to youth court for some much-needed exercise. I don't have time for the gym. It would mean getting up earlier than my usual



6.15am. While I'm walking I pay bills and book a doctor's appointment. I've got a date tonight, despite being terrible at making time for men. I deleted Tinder as I never had time to respond.

Friday: I get a lot done working from 7.30am to 5pm and go for a drink with the team. After a few glasses of wine I head home. Dinner is takeaway pizza, which I eat while reading my book. I wake at 11pm after falling asleep on the sofa and read a bit more before bed at 11.30pm.

Saturday: I head to the office as usual to get on top of next week's cases: it's easier to work when the office is empty. It's a friend's birthday so I drive to their house after lunch for a BBQ and stay until 10pm. I probably spend about 10 hours

socialising a week, but I wish it was more.

Sunday: My plan is to get some 'me time'. I meet a friend for brunch, do some chores and sink into my sofa. I'm not a domestic goddess but I do the basics. I read for a bit - some weeks I spend 15 hours reading for work and pleasure - then relax with a rom-com and a flick through Facebook.

Laura's verdict: I'd say Briony has an energy problem. She is genuinely busy at work but lets it prey on her mind and feels exhausted, which is unusual for a young woman working her hours. More sleep or exercise might help her manage her energy.

Laura's busy rating: 7/10



How to avoid busy burnout

Advice to make a crammed calendar feel satisfying not stressful

MAKE A MUST-DO LIST

"Streamline your time," says Sarah Knight, author of *The Life-Changing Magic Of Not Giving A F*ck*. "People are often paralysed by endless to-do lists and cancel plans because they feel overwhelmed. Instead, distil it down and create a daily 'must-do' list consisting of only things that must happen today to maximise your time."

USE FREE-TIME MINDFULLY

Be smart with the few free moments you get says time management expert Laura Vanderkam. "People who relax using social media or TV without mindfully choosing what they're engaging with feel they have less time than those who spend time doing activities like reading."

VALUE CREATIVITY

Carving out time for free-thinking is crucial. "Put in blocks of time to work on your projects, not just respond to other people's problems," says psychologist Meg Dennison. "Think about the last time you came up with a great idea. Most likely it was during a time your brain was resting, like in the shower."

GO ON A NO-DIET

"Before you say 'yes' to anything, pause," Dennison advises. "Is your body saying yes? Do you really want to do it? I can't tell you how many times I've worked with people and they're saying yes but their heads are shaking 'no.'" And if you feel like you can't outright refuse, negotiate; meeting halfway can stop your calendar being overbooked.

LISTEN TO THE NEGATIVES

Be honest with yourself about which tasks bring you joy and which make you grit your teeth. "If you love being on the run or in back-to-back meetings, that's great," says Knight. "But if it's bringing you more pain than pleasure allow yourself to think 'My life is terrible, I don't want to do this.' Doing stuff just because it brings prestige can lead to overwhelm."

