



## Episode 129: Self-Care During Bar Prep

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're talking about ways to engage in self-care for the bar exam without breaking the bank. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). Alison always runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a [review](#) on iTunes and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com](#) and we'd love to hear from you and with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today, we're talking about something that's incredibly important for everyone who's preparing for the bar, which is self-care. Because let's face it, studying for the bar exam is stressful and actually so is legal practice. So, working on self-care during the bar is the thing that will probably help you pass and also help you in your career later. And the good news is this doesn't have to be all that complicated or expensive. I mean, it's not just a New Year's resolution about waking up, working out 7 days a week or never eating a drop of sugar again. I mean those might be great goals if it works for you, but self-care is really about simple goals. So, today we're going to talk about realistic, simple things you can do to help yourself feel better and manage the stress and anxiety that comes inevitably when you're studying for the bar exam. So, Lee what's first on your list?

Lee Burgess: So, the first one is definitely cheap and easy and it's breathing.

Alison Monahan: Well, we do have to breathe.

Lee Burgess: We do have to breathe. I mean we're all alive. We have to breathe but I think it is something that we tend to ignore. I know that I found myself ignoring it at various points. When you're working hard, or you're stressed because we actually tend to hold our breath when we get stressed or anxious. Just breathing normally, deeply, and consistency actually gets your brain the oxygen it needs to work properly and there of course are some different kind of breathing techniques we're going to talk about in a second.

But I think it is important if you are sitting at a table while you're listening to this and to take a moment and just think about how you're sitting in your body because it's possible you are hunched off, which is compressing the front part of your body and you may find yourself that you're not even taking deep breaths,

which means that you are kind of cheating yourself out of one of the things that your body needs to work correctly. But also, to calm anxiety and stress.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's funny when you were saying that. I was actually noticing that I was. My shoulders were hunched forward and right at the bottom, kind of the point of my ribcage, where the ribs come together, I felt like that's where my breath was, which is only about halfway down your lungs. So, I just made an effort to sit up straight, put my shoulders back, and I was like, "Oh wow. I am breathing a lot better now."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, it's really weird when you start to be a little conscious of it, of how poorly we're all doing something that is really essential to life. One of the things that most of us want to be doing but we don't really do is this idea of belly breathing. If you've even taken a yoga class, you probably heard about belly breathing. But basically 98% of our oxygen receptors are located in the lungs, lower lobes, so that means if you're hunched over your desk, you're totally cheating your body out of that.

Alison Monahan: So, I'm only getting like 2% of the oxygen I should be getting.

Lee Burgess: Right. In order to meaningfully trigger your brain's relaxation response, you've got to take deep breaths into your abdomen. Sometimes this can be hard to do when you're sitting but it's important to recognize that the shallow and quick breathing we often do when we're working can actually trigger the stress response because your body doesn't think you're getting enough oxygen. So, if you catch yourself either holding your breath or if your breath is just lingering at chest level, you want to take a few of these belly breaths. Some people even recommend that you can imagine your breath has a color and as you breathe, visualize the color moving from your chest all the way down to the belly. You can put your hand on your belly and start to notice that your belly is moving. If your belly is not moving, breath is not going in and out of it.

Then also start to notice while you're doing this breathing, where are you holding stress? Places that most of us hold stress that we never think about is in your jaw. I think, unless you've had jaw issues. But so often, I know when I'm doing yoga or something like that, the teacher would always say, "Make sure that your jaw is relaxed." Then you realize that you're in some crazy pose and my jaw is all clenched and your toe is compressed.

It's parts of your body that you don't necessarily notice that you're doing this. It's like, are you scrunching your lips? Do your shoulders creep up to your ears? Just start to acknowledge what you're doing in your body and see if you can release that tension and think about those points of tension as you breathe. You can do this for a few minutes, a few seconds. But no matter what you do, your brain and your body's going to be better oxygenated. So, it's going to be more relaxed and ready to work and memorize things. It's really funny. It's something so simple and yet we're all so bad at it, most of us are.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. For sure. I think it's also something that's useful to take even into the exam room with you. If you're imagining how it's going to be when you take the bar, you're probably not going to be feeling totally relaxed. So, planning ahead of how you're going to handle that situation when they hand the papers out and you turn it over and you start to feel very anxious or you get to an essay question or an MBA question and you're not sure what the answer is, and you start to feel yourself really getting tense, even in that scenario, even under time pressure, you can take a couple of deep breaths. It's going to calm your brain. It's going to calm your body and you're going to be better positioned to actually thoughtfully answer these questions than you are if you're just kind of a total stress case, who's just like, "Oh my God. Oh my God. I don't know the answer. I don't know the answer." That's going to spiral, and then probably not great things may happen.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. We've mentioned on the podcast before, but there's something very, very simple that they call tactical breathing that the military uses as well, which is very, very simple. You literally breathe in for four counts. You hold it for four counts and then you exhale for four counts. This is proven to calm your nervous system. So, snipers use this to make their hands not shake. This is no joke. I mean think about it. If they can make their hands stop shaking, that's pretty powerful stuff. You can do tactical breathing anytime, anywhere when you feel like you need to kind of calm your nervous system. It's a great thing to practice before going into the exam situation because you can call on it in the room. You can time yourself how long it takes to breathe in for four, hold for four, and breathe out for four. It's such a small sliver of time, which you're going to make that time back by having calmer nerves and being able to think more efficiently.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I've also seen this when referred to or something very similar referred to as box breathing. If you envision in your mind as you inhale, you can even draw your finger up for those counts and then you're holding, you bring it across. You exhale down and in this case, they have you hold it again at the bottom, so your finger meets back where you started but box breathing. Just think of it like a shoebox. If you're like, "Ugh what was that about?" Up, across, down, across, up, across, down, across. Very, very simple. Another one that I've heard about really in yoga classes is alternate nostril breathing. I mean I'm assume, have you done this too in a yoga class?

Lee Burgess: Oh, I actually have a yoga teacher who's pretty obsessed with this. We do it quite a bit, which it does feel very dorky. But it is grounding, and it makes you really focus on the breath. But you do feel a little silly doing it, so maybe this is one you may not want to do it in the library. Although let's be honest, nobody's paying attention to what you're doing in the library. You can do just about anything, I think. Or people that are doing things that are stranger than alternate nostril breathing in the library.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean honestly, if all you're doing is it looks like you're kind of holding your nose. What you're really doing is pushing one side or the other. But yeah, I

mean, it does feel a little silly. But I've always found it very calming whenever we do it in yoga class, it kind of balances your brain. It can be good for headaches and things like that. I think we have a [tutorial](#) we can link to in the show notes if people are curious about how it's done. But basically, I mean the gist of it as I recall is you kind of close off one nostril with a finger, you breathe in, you hold it, you switch nostrils. You breathe out and then you breathe in, hold it, switch nostrils, breathe out is that basically accurate?

Lee Burgess: That's the gist. I think the idea too is it's making you very aware of the breath and you're kind of flooding different parts of your head with breath, which can be very powerful. So, yeah, it's worth trying, check out the tutorial in the show notes. What have you got to lose? It's free. It's air. You can just try it, whenever you want.

Alison Monahan: It's air and it's free.

Lee Burgess: Air and it's free. You know what else is free?

Alison Monahan: May as well give it a shot.

Lee Burgess: Moving your body. Yeah. The other thing that's free is moving your body and again, we're talking about realistic goals. These are like taking breaks to walk around the block. One of the things that I've been doing, because this has been our busy season right before recording this, so I haven't had a lot of time for my own self-care as I take longer walk to get to and from my office. Because I can't say, "Oh, I have to get there faster because I have to walk a certain way." I have to get there.

But if you add an extra 5 or 10 minutes to a walk each way, that's an extra 20 minutes of moving your body a day and it adds up. Just get a little creative. It doesn't have to be necessarily grinding at the gym or going to a workout class or things like that. But it's something to think about how you can just add in time to move your body. Your bar schedule should also include time to do things like exercise, that's very important. But a lot of students find that can seem very overwhelming to try and find time to go to the gym or they're too tired or they're cold or it's raining or they're busy. I mean there can be multiple things. Park your car farther away from the library, especially when you walk to library.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I think starting with baby steps is probably a good way to go. This is probably not the time to start training for a marathon if you've never run more than a mile before. I mean, I definitely agree on the walking. I think walking particularly if it's in a natural environment or even in a city environment, where you know there's interesting stuff to look at, can be a really great way to refresh your brain and also get a little bit of exercise.

For me, I made sure that my post office box, where I got packages was maybe a half mile from where my office was, so that I could go and collect my package

and also get some fresh air and take a walk with people can be great. I mean my mother loves to go probably daily really, either hiking or walking around the neighborhood with her friends and that's their social occasion and they're also getting outside, getting some exercise.

Just basic moving even if it's you putting on some music. When I was in law school, we were notorious in my apartment because our kitchen faced a light well, where a bunch of other people's kitchens ... It was the entire building was law students' apartments. But when we were all really stressed out and studying a lot, we would actually put on music that we just loved in the kitchen when we were making food or something. The kitchen was tiny. It was New York City. The three roommates would all be dancing around wildly in the kitchen and all these other people were watching us. But it was fun. It was free. It was easy. We were making dinner anyway. We just have to occasionally stir something. But it was actually a fun time and I think it really helped relieve stress.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Something we talked about in a recent podcast, episode two was if you're really feeling strapped for cash, it's a great time to try, sometimes these unlimited exercise packages that can come up or free trials that can come up for 30 days of yoga for \$30 or try the gym-

Alison Monahan: When I was studying for the bar, I did an unlimited yoga package for the month beforehand and I literally went at least twice a day to the point where they were like, "What's going on here? Why are you here every day? In the morning and in the evening?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm studying for the bar exam." They're like, "Great. Do you think you should add in lunchtime too?" But I definitely got my money's worth with that month-long package.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So again, it can take being a little creative but especially if you're somewhere where the weather's not very good while you're studying, finding a place where you can do it inside exercise activity to move your body might be critical.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's definitely going to make you feel better. I know for me, yeah, I always kind of dread like I just can't be bothered. I have so much stuff to do. I really just don't want to go today. I get to this place I go, which I really love, and I start working out and I'm like, "Why didn't I want to come?" This is great. I should do this more often. I think you kind of have to trick yourself a little bit sometimes and/or either trick yourself into going by just committing to it or you have to acknowledge that okay, the way that I feel about this before I go is not the way that I will feel when I'm there and I'll be happy I'm there once I'm there.

Lee Burgess: Yeah and you just have to work it into your bar to do list. Let's be honest, going to whatever class you've signed up for is probably going to be more fun than studying.

Alison Monahan: True. This is true.

Lee Burgess: The bar is very low in bar exam time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. That's true. Good point. Pretty much anything's probably going to be more enjoyable than studying for the bar.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I think if price and cost is becoming the thing that's prohibitive to you, ask around. A lot of times if you're studying for the February bar, almost every exercise outlet has some sort of New Year package waiving some sort of fee, something. Sometimes they have cleaning exchanges. You can see if you could do an hour of work around the gym to be able to be there for the whole month, whatever it might be. Ask questions because you want to incorporate this as you're going to be happier and healthier. You're not going to get sick as often, which is also very important when you're studying for the bar. Taking good care of yourself doesn't have to be costly, but it literally can just be taking the long route home when you're walking home.

Alison Monahan: Exactly and I think just thinking of ways to incorporate more pleasant activities into your day, whether it's walking to get your mail or whatever it might be, that's totally fine. You have time to do that. You can't actually study 18 hours a day, every day for the bar exam. You're going to have plenty of time to take a few minutes, go to the gym, take a walk, do whatever it is. In a way you kind of take advantage of that time by building it in, then you're going to come back [refreshed to your study](#).

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Maybe you got a Fitbit for one of your last holidays or an Apple Watch or something, some people really love tracking things like this. Sometimes, you can even set realistic goals if you have walking or activity goals and you can use that to kind of hold yourself accountable. Some people even come up with situations where they have rewards. If you hit your certain steps for five days of the week, you get to go get a mani/pedi or something like that. That's the first reward that come to mind for me but maybe that's because I'm sitting here going wow, you really need a mani/pedi. But-

Alison Monahan: Oh my God, tell me about it.

Lee Burgess: I know. But you know, whatever it might be, or you get to go get your favorite burrito for dinner. You get to go to the movies, you can come up with lots of different almost games that you can play with yourself. I've never been a huge Fitbit tracker person, but my husband has one. What's funny is when we're together, we were together this weekend and I'm always like, "How many steps did we do today?" He's like, "Didn't you have one of these?" I was like, "Yeah. I don't know where it is." I haven't worn it in like a year. I don't know if it made it through the last move. But it's funny because I'm obsessed with his number tracking because I'm like, "Well if we've been together all day, our numbers have to be about the same." I don't know they can be fun.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So, he'll be very motivated by a sort of a gamification of their life. Unfortunately, that's never really done much for me but hey, if it works for you. Fantastic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I just went and saw David Sedaris give a reading. He wears a Fitbit and an Apple Watch, so he can compare the two.

Alison Monahan: See, I would do that just because I would be like, "why are they different? What's going on here?"

Lee Burgess: I know.

Alison Monahan: I would find that part interesting. I just wouldn't care what the actual number was.

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. I know. I know. Okay. Something else that is free that you may think is a little kooky is laughing. Your brain is very smart but it's also pretty gullible. Even if you're in the depths of bar exam despair, your brain doesn't really have to know it because smiling and laughing, even when we're faking it tricks our brain into thinking we're full of joy and the brain actually creates serotonin.

Serotonin is our very own built-in antidepressant painkiller, stress reducer, brain booster. You got to load up on smiling as laughing. They've actually seen that this can be productive in cancer research, [helping cure cancer](#) and it can definitely help you study for the bar. This can be watching a funny TV show, smiling to yourself for no reason at all. You can watch funny things on the Internet. We can link to a bunch of videos about [kittens](#). That's a good place to start.

I had a yoga teacher who did this training in laughing yoga. We would go sit in this class. I think it was actually a prenatal yoga class. There was a bunch of pregnant ladies sitting around. It was probably the funniest thing. Somebody should have YouTubed it. But she was actually talking about birth, which is a stressful situation. She was also a doula and she's like, "Some people can laugh through parts of birth to get through difficult things because it just tricks your brain." I can also say I do not believe I laughed during the birth of my son but hey, maybe I could have tried it if I really needed that moment. But there are a lot of people who just think sitting around and laughing. Actually, after a while, you feel really ridiculous and then the longer you force yourself to laugh, you eventually actually do start laughing because it's kind of ridiculous.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. That's pretty interesting.

Lee Burgess: Now, you can all picture me sitting pregnant in a room with everybody laughing around us. It was kind of silly.

Alison Monahan: It sounds pretty comical I have to say.

Lee Burgess: It has its moments.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think this is a great tip because it just be the difference between watching a depressing movie or series in the evenings and watching something that you find legitimately funny like if you're studying for the bar, you probably shouldn't be watching really heavy depressing stuff. You should probably be watching light, funny things because it's actually going to help your brain.

Lee Burgess: I know. It's true. In fact, we've talked a lot. We're going to talk a little bit about sleep. But sleep is another thing you want to focus on and I find I have to be really careful about what shows I watch right before bed because if they are not, they're super intense, it does not set yourself up to feel good to wind down. My husband and I were behind that we just tried to check out The Night Of. Have you watched this?

Alison Monahan: Nope.

Lee Burgess: I think it's on HBO. Anyway, it's quite good. It's about this guy who is, I believe he's wrongfully accused of killing a young woman and he's Muslim and there's a lot of issues about how that plays into his incarceration and things like that. But it's not exactly light watching. It was basically the other night I'm like-

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It doesn't really sound like it.

Lee Burgess: I was like, "We can watch this another time. I cannot do this before bed anymore because it is the opposite of a laughing therapy." It was the oh my gosh, I'm super stressed. All I can think about is how awful some of this scenario is and that's not going to help me. Yeah. You got to be conscious about what you're doing. But maybe I should sit in my room and laugh after watching something like that. Maybe it'll make a difference.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, no. I, for sure had to stop watching The Wire before I went to sleep because it was just way too intense. But I do remember on, I think between this when California still have the three-day bar. So, between the second and third days of the bar exam, I was just so burned out and I was just like I cannot even think about studying or anything right now. I remember turning on the TV and they had Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle and so I sat and watched that movie. I was just cracking up alone in my hotel room but maybe they helped me pass the bar, who knows.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's really interesting. I think I watched Happy Feet during lunch one day during the bar, which I think is a Disney or Pixar movie about dancing penguins, but it was really good bar entertainment.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so think about your media consumption, basically during this study period.

Lee Burgess: Yeah or books. I actually had a book with me that I was reading during the bar exam when California was the three-day bar. And the night before the last one, I realized the plot was shifting and somebody was going to get cancer and it was going to be really sad. It was like this light bulb turned on. I was like, "I am closing this book and putting it away because that is not what I need right now."

Alison Monahan: Yeah like where's my Cosmo?

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I was like, "People Magazine, where are you?" Basically, yeah. Okay. Something else for free, which is very connected to the breathing is trying mindfulness. [Mindfulness](#) is something that we've talked about here on the podcast before. But it's really the practice of being fully, gently conscious and present without judgment or reaction. Practicing mindfulness through meditation helps you relax your brain, clears out the clutter, builds memory, energy, resilience, and immunity. If you have not realized that meditation or mindfulness is good for you, all you have to do is Google it and there's a bazillion studies now that are supporting that sort of mindfulness practice is good for you.

But if so this something you've never done, sometimes there can be a community center or yoga studio that will do some mindfulness training. You can download a ton of [apps](#) on your phone that will help you through walking through mediation. It's something worth trying. Some people find it really life changing. A lot of people find it as a way to [manage stress, anxiety during the bar](#). A lot of people find it as a way to refocus during the bar exam. I have had students, especially with those who have extended time, even having memorized mediations to try and refocus their brain if focus is one of the things that they struggle with. It can be pretty powerful stuff. So, you want to consider learning more about it and it's just your mind or maybe you buy an app. It's like a \$1.99, not so bad.

Alison Monahan: Yeah or there's a book that I read repeatedly actually in law school. It's what I would read before going to sleep because I found it very calming. Which could actually be totally ideal for the bar exam scenario because it's called The Places that Scare You, which I think anyone who walks into the bar exam, if they're being honest probably is going to admit to being a little bit frightened, totally normal. But it's by Pema Chodron and it's a very sort of readable intro to a particular type of Buddhist practice. But I find it really helpful and I think again these are just techniques that you can employ in these situations that do have a pretty strong basis in science and medicine.

People are really starting to understand why they work. But the reality is they do work. I think some people when they start practicing mindfulness can have some pretty strong reactions to things that maybe they haven't necessarily dealt

with in the past or whatever it is. So, if you find that happening for you, the bar exam period might not be the best time to take this up but there are different types.

Maybe you could find a guided meditation that you just find relaxing that isn't asking you to delve into the depths of your brain or your psyche. If one thing doesn't work for you like a sitting meditation doesn't work, but maybe you can meditate while you're working on a mantra or something like that, there's lots of different ways you can do this. But I think a lot of them are going to be really beneficial and good skills that you can use for the bar exam and for your life.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Sometimes I find especially, when I'm really busy or I've been working really hard that even just talking a walk with no earbuds in, so you're not listening to music, you're not listening to a podcast, just in silence can just be so calming. I think we sometimes forget in how inundated we are with noise and thoughts and things like that. It really could be something as simple as I'm going to choose to take a long walk home and not engage in something else, just going to you know.

Alison Monahan: Yeah or even just going to your favorite coffee shop where it's a comfortable environment and you maybe have passersby that you can watch or eavesdrop on or whatever and just kind of letting your brain wander. Not bringing your bar books and not looking at your phone and just kind of sit there. We so rarely just sit around for 20 minutes anymore because the second you sit down at a coffee place usually it's like, where's my phone? Who's trying to get in touch with me. What email do I have? What's new on Facebook? What's new on Twitter? What's new on Instagram? That doesn't allow your brain to relax. Just going and sitting with a pot of tea or cup of coffee and just drink it. That alone can be a meditation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's very true. Yeah. I was thinking about that the other day when I was waiting in line somewhere. I'm like, I guess I used to just wait in line 10 years before.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we used to just stand there. We would just stand there and look around and see what was going on and maybe be like, ooh that guy's kind of cute. I wonder if he has a girlfriend.

Lee Burgess: I know. Totally. It is funny how ... That was only like 10, 11 years ago. It's amazing how things have changed. Yeah, you can even do something super crazy and turn your phone off. Whoa.

Alison Monahan: Or leave it at home. Oh my gosh. It's doable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The other night I went out to dinner for the evening and I left my phone at home and it was really lovely.

Alison Monahan: On purpose?

Lee Burgess: No, on accident. But it was lovely once I didn't have it with me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah that's a good thing. We all managed to survive not that long ago without being constantly connected to the Internet, it's really doable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. No, the funny thing was I had so much of my kid's junk in my purse that my purse was so heavy I couldn't tell that my phone wasn't in it because I had a toy airplane and a bunch of stuff. I look in my purse and I'm like, "I don't even have ... Where's my stuff?" I have my husband's extra glasses. I'm like, "Where's my stuff in my bag?"

Alison Monahan: Well, maybe simplifying your bag can be a next step.

Lee Burgess: I know. Maybe that's my next mediation whenever it can happen.

Alison Monahan: I think actually simplifying your life in general when you're studying for the bar is a great way to do self-care because the less clutter you have to be thinking about and carrying around and all these things, it's amazing every time I look in a bag that I carry regularly, how much crap is in there. You realize okay, I probably need some of these things that are in my personal pharmacy. But I probably don't need say four things of Kleenex and four things of mosquito repellent. Probably one of each would do. I could just get rid of it and even that, you just feel lighter and easier to focus. You can kind of approach your whole life like that. I mean I think figuring out for some people, maybe this is a good distraction, figuring out your kitchen situation or cleaning out your kitchen. As long as you just limit the time that you do that, it can be a very beneficial thing to do while you study.

Lee Burgess: It's true. All right. Something else that we've clearly both done a lot of is yoga. But what a lot of people don't know is that if you don't have access to a yoga studio, maybe it's hard to get to or you're not in an area where there's a lot of yoga, now there's a bunch of online yoga that's even pretty cheap and we'll link to one option in the show notes. It's called [yogaglow.com](http://yogaglow.com). But you can do yoga at home and I know people that do this and really enjoy it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think the studio that I went to San Francisco all the time actually has a class online. I guess a bunch of classes. It would almost be like if I put it on the TV, it'll almost be like I was in the class. It might not be perfect, but it's a pretty good substitute.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's better than not doing anything.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: [Some yoga poses](#), something as simple as [child's pose](#) can just calm the nervous system. That's what it's there for. If you're into yoga, you also might look for restorative yoga classes or workshops because that can be very calming, meditative, relaxing hour, hour in change and you might find that's exactly what you need. Also, one of the things I love about yoga is because it's one of the few times in my week that I bend my body in ways that do not include standing or sitting, basically. We were talking about breathing and expanding your space. But the first thing you bend backwards I was like, "Oh, it's so refreshing. Why don't I bend backwards more often?" These little movements that we don't do as part of our daily life can just feel so good because your body is like thank you for you not moving me in this very repetitive way every day, all the time. That's one of the things I really like about it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right, and I think I like the fact that depending on what you need at that moment, you can pick a different type of class. If you're really stressed out, feeling really drained, maybe the restorative class is perfect. But if you just can't get going and you just can't make yourself do anything and you can't drag yourself off to study, then maybe you need to do a more intense class that kind of jump starts you. So, you can kind of calibrate what kind of experience you need at that moment and that can be very beneficial I think.

Lee Burgess: Yep. I think so too. Well of this has really been about taking breaks. That's something else that's free is to just take a break because studying too long in a day, studying too long during the week, and not taking breaks is a terrible idea. It leads to burnout and you're not studying effectively. You should schedule breaks not only to go do the stuff that we've been talking about but also taking breaks with friends and family, scheduling dinners out, going to the movies, doing whatever you do to make yourself feel good and connected is very important and I would recommend that you schedule them and put them on your calendar, so they don't become optional. They're part of what you're doing while you're studying.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think on that point, you need to think about sort of micro and macro level breaks. How many hours can you reasonably commit to studying in one day? Figure out what that number is and then around that, you plan in dinner with your friends, going to the movies, sit with your husband. But then also even within that timeframe, it's not realistic to think you're going to sit down and study continuously for eight hours or even continuously for four hours.

I think most people are a lot more productive when they study say 45 minutes and then take a 10 or 15-minute break and then come back and do another portion of an hour and then take another break. People can feel guilty and of course you have to sort of enforce mechanisms to ensure that your 15-minute break does not go to 50 minutes. But within that I think it's okay to ... You don't have to sit and try to focus for four straight hours. That's probably just not realistic. It's probably not even realistic on the day of the bar exam. It's fine to

get up and get a drink of water every hour or go to the bathroom. You're not tied to your seat. You're allowed to get up for five minutes. It's fine.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean that's true and we even talk about with our tutoring students, taking breaks in the exam period too. It can be doing one of the breathing exercises we talked about or it can be going to the bathroom or washing your hands or getting a drink of water. But sometimes breaks are really, really important. You need to practice taking them to find out which breaks serve you and how long you can focus. Some people can do an hour, 90 minutes, 2 hours without needing to get up. Some people can only make it 45 minutes and that's no judgment. But if you know that about yourself, then you need to stand up every 45 minutes.

Alison Monahan: I'm definitely a 45-minute person. That's why I love the circle's technique. If I can focus 45 or 50 minutes, I'm having a really productive hour. That's all I can ask of myself and I know that and I'm totally fine with it.

Lee Burgess: No. All right. One of the other super easy and free things as long as you don't drink the bottled version is to drink a lot of water. Water like breath is something that we all need to survive. But we cannot take in enough of it. It turns out your brain is about 85% water. Give it a lot of water. Although caffeinated beverages have water, I don't think those things count.

Alison Monahan: I was going to say, I'm not sure that water can take the form of tea and coffee only or you're probably going to get a pretty bad headache by the end of the day because you're probably dehydrated. I mean again, no judgment you can have whatever caffeine you want. But if you have a cup of tea or you have a cup of coffee or whatever, have some water with it or after it so you're hydrating that and you're not just diluting your brain of the water it needs to function.

Same with food, if you're studying a lot, I always found myself absolutely famished even though I was just sitting there. But it was because your brain is using a tone of glucose and you actually may need to think about different snacks and things that maybe aren't what you would normally think of as healthier food. I mean sometimes for me, I would just have to have something ridiculous like gummy bears because my brain literally needed a sugar hit. I'm not saying that's what I would do every hour of the day for my entire life. But sometimes in the middle of the third hour of the study session, it was just like I just need some candy. I'm sorry.

Lee Burgess: Or like even chocolate covered almonds, which gives you fat and sugar together can be really productive. But even learning what are your best snacks can be very effective. What makes you feel better? What gives you that jolt? As you get closer to the exam, you're going to need to practice not eating for the three, three and a half hours depending on how your exam is set up because if your body's like, oh I'm used to getting my gummy bear every hour, then there's no gummy bear-

Alison Monahan: Let's keep those under the bar, sorry.

Lee Burgess: Right. You can't smuggle your gummy bears. But I think during study, you have to be very conscious of when you're hungry and when your energy is starting to dip. I'll be honest, I'm going to get lunch after this and nobody wants to be in that next meeting until I've eaten some food.

Alison Monahan: No, they've even done studies of judges that show they're much harsher right before lunch and at the end of the day.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right and last, but definitely not least is sleep. Even lawyers to be, we are all animals and we need to sleep. We cannot pull all-nighters. They are our worst enemy when it comes to the bar exam because sleep deprivation decreases cognition and concentration. It increases your irritability, your blood pressure, you name it, you name it, you name it. You need to sleep as often as you can throughout your study process.

You want to get off the screens, maybe at least 30 minutes before bed. You can switch your phone or your computer to the [red light](#). You can get the things that put the filters on your computer to filter out the blue light. You can wear those goofy glasses to filter out blue light if it's something that really affects you. But be conscious that your devices are not helping you get some rest and you may drink a lot of caffeine but it's probably a good idea to try and save that for the morning. If you're someone who has it interfere with sleep because you don't want to be up all hours of the night.

Alison Monahan: Yeah absolutely. I think this is another place exercise can really come into play because if you do vigorous exercise during the day, you're probably going to be tired at night. It's going to be a lot easier to fall asleep. I mean I'm definitely a person who has always had sleep issues and insomnia and all these things and I really find that one of the biggest differences for me is if I do some vigorous exercise, I just literally can't stay awake. That can really help if you're struggling. I think if you're really struggling to sleep, this is an area to get help in, whether it's a doctor or whoever it is because it's not going to get better as you get closer to the bar exam and you want to make sure you are getting that restorative sleep that's enabling you to learn and remember things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. Don't ignore it. No sleep doesn't ever go anywhere good, basically.

Alison Monahan: No. No. I mean it makes driving and things, like I think even one or two nights of sleep deprivation are as bad as being very drunk. So, imagine taking the bar exam completely drunk. That's basically what you're doing if you're not sleeping.

Lee Burgess: Yep. Another thing to think about is let's say you're living with a bunch of roommates, I'm a big proponent of the white noise machine that can solve

distractions, especially if you're in a city and there can be noise outside that can wake you up or your roommates are loud or you're trying to go to bed earlier but other people in your house investing in a nice white noise machine can really do wonders to help you get extra sleep.

Alison Monahan: Yep or noise canceling earphones. Although, those are definitely not cheap but regular earphones, you can find some really decent earphones at your local drugstore for not very much money and a decent set of ... You can look on the package, it has a number that tells you, oh, these are my blocking. Get the blocking ones. The more blocking, the better. But they're cheap. You can afford it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah and if it helps you sleep and focus, totally worth it.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely.

Lee Burgess: All right, well with that, I think we are about out of time because it's lunchtime for us or at least for me.

Alison Monahan: Whew I mean I can go longer. Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I know. I'm going to get some water. I'm going to get some good food. It's going to be nice. If you enjoy this episode of The Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to [leave a review and rating](#) on iTunes, we really appreciate it. Be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. Remember you can check out more bar tips on our sister site, [barexamtoolbox.com](#) and we also have [helpful resources and courses](#) and [tutoring](#) for those who are studying for the California and UBE bar exam. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at [Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com), or you can always contact us via our [website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

#### Resources:

- [Yoga Breathing: Alternate Nostril Breathing Video Tutorial](#)
- [Breath + Sound: 30 Minute Guided Breathwork Experience](#)
- [Harvard Health Blog, "Regular exercise changes the brain to improve memory, thinking skills."](#)
- [Cancer Treatment Centers of America – Laughter Therapy](#)
- [Kitten Therapy: The Prescription for Stress](#)
- [Getting Started with Mindfulness](#)
- [Being with Stressful Moments Rather Than Avoiding Them](#)
- [Insight Timer App](#)
- [Free Guided Meditations: UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center](#)
- [Living Peace: Connecting Your Spirituality with Your Work for Justice](#)
- [Yogaglow.com](#)

- [Yoga Outlet - How to do Child's Pose in Yoga](#)
- [Yoga Journal - Yoga for Inner Peace](#)
- [Get a Good Night's Sleep by Filtering Your Phone's Blue Light](#)
- [Mind Over Bar](#)
- [Bar Exam Mind](#)
- Bar Exam Toolbox's own [Mindfulness](#) archives