

Top Tips for Managing Procrastination

Look at the Pros and Cons

Take a closer look at your procrastination and figure out if it's worth it. Procrastination might help you to have more fun and cope with stress in the short-term, but at what cost? Make a list of all the good things that will happen when you stop procrastinating and all the not so good things that will continue to happen if you don't stop procrastinating. Being clear on your reasons for change will help you to break the procrastination cycle.

Understand Your Procrastination

The first step in changing procrastination is identifying your triggers, your procrastination activities, and your procrastination excuses. Keep a procrastination diary for 2 weeks. Look out for times when you put off doing something you need to do for something less important. Write down what you were supposed to do, what you did instead, and what you said to yourself to justify your procrastination.

Challenge Your Excuses

Look at your procrastination excuses. Are they valid? When you say you'll do it later, do you? Look at your procrastination excuses objectively and ask yourself: What happened last time you went along with this excuse? Will you really be better off if you put the task off? Is it really true that you can't even start a small part of the task now? Will you really feel more inspired later? If you do make a start on the task now how will you feel? If you avoid the task how will you feel? Keep an eye out for procrastination excuses and try to see them for what they are – loopholes that will distract you from your goals.

Get Organised

Look at your week and figure out when you have time to do the things you need to do. You're more likely to procrastinate when you know you have to sit and work for long blocks of time so set yourself small time goals instead. For example, aim to do 3 x 30-minute intervals of work rather than one 90 minute block. Have specific goals for what you want to accomplish in each of these blocks of time.

Minimise Distractions

If you know you're easily distracted avoid working in areas where there are lots of distractions. If you work in an open plan office, take yourself into a meeting room or block out distractions with ear plugs. Put your phone on silent and take it off your desk, and close any windows on your computer that might distract you. Close Facebook and if you can, shut down your emails. If the internet has too many distractions try downloading a free program like Self-Control for Mac. It will block you from sites you request to be blocked from for pre-determined periods of time.

PROCRASTINATION

Most people put off tasks they dislike until they absolutely have to do them, but 20% of people are chronic procrastinators. Common signs are:

- Finding it hard to start new tasks
- Prioritising less important tasks
- Repeatedly under-estimating how long a task will take to complete
- Difficulty breaking tasks down into small steps
- Being late to appointments or meetings

To avoid the guilt of procrastination, chronic procrastinators create excuses to justify their actions, for example:

- I've got plenty of time, I can start later
- I work better when I'm stressed so I'll start work closer to the deadline
- I'm too tired, I'm better off starting tomorrow

Why someone procrastinates varies from person to person, but common causes of procrastination are:

- An inability to tolerate aversive tasks
- An ability to sustain attention
- Perfectionism
- A fear of failure

Procrastination isn't necessarily problematic, but procrastination that results in negative outcomes – like stress and anxiety - is a problem.

Where this is the case, seek the advice of a clinical psychologist.