

PROCRASTINATION

Why It Happens & How to Break the Habit



Procrastination is putting things off until it's too late or you need to rush to finish it, causing yourself and others a lot of unnecessary pain and stress. Nearly 88% of the world's working population is said to be guilty of this type of behavior at some point in their life. It's mostly inevitable and only harmful if you let it manifest in your life and become chronic.

Chronic procrastination can lead to poor health, career growth, personal growth, and relationships. However, there are simple ways to overcome it as long as you commit to change.

In this guide, you will discover what type of procrastinator you are, common reasons you developed this habit, and ways to fix it to improve your relationships and live a happier, more fulfilling, and successful life.

Procrastination and Your Brain

Research performed and uncovered at the Procrastination Research Group has found a connection in our brain that allows us to understand procrastination a little better. Their research shows that the way the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala in our brain react together is likely the actual culprit to procrastination. This means science shows that procrastination is more often a result of your emotions than a lack of self-discipline.

Your Prefrontal Cortex and the Amygdala

The amygdala is a set of neurons that resemble the shape of almonds and is found within the brain's medial temporal lobe. It forms part of the limbic system, which plays an integral part in how we process our emotions and respond to fear.

In other words, when you approach a particular situation or challenge in life, your limbic system is what helps you feel pleasure or pain, and your amygdala is what helps you feel stressed or become fearful. It is directly responsible for your “fight or flight” response.

Your prefrontal cortex, on the other hand, is there to help balance these reactions or emotions and is responsible for the functions that allow you to process, plan and focus on everyday life tasks that are needed to get through the day. When you start to procrastinate, your prefrontal cortex starts fighting with the amygdala and, in many cases, loses the battle – in turn continuing your procrastination.

This is because once you start procrastinating, your amygdala recognizes the task as an aversion or negative thing and releases hormones that make you feel uncomfortable, anxious, fearful, or other emotions of discomfort. Your amygdala wants you to get away

and run as fast as possible to get to safety and not have to do the work or task, making you procrastinate. When your prefrontal cortex can balance these emotions instead, that's when you can get back to work.

Many different variables in the world can cause these negative emotions. Moreover, it's essential to show that procrastination produces a chemical response in your brain as it can lead to adverse side effects. Constant up-and-down emotions or never-ending emotional trauma can create chaos throughout your life and can affect your health. This is why it's crucial to uncover what is causing you to procrastinate and develop techniques to cure it; your health and relationships depend on it.

Common Causes of Procrastination

There are many misconceptions about what causes procrastination. Society views procrastinators as lazy, selfish, and borderline narcissistic. Even if you do think you're lazy or someone else is lazy, it is not always the case. Causes are broad and include multiple different factors, some of which are personal that you may never experience.

Below are common causes of procrastination:

Perfectionism

Many times, procrastination is the result of perfectionism. This can come about in a couple of different ways. Either you push it off because you know you can't get it done precisely the way you want, or you end up redoing the assignment too many times until it's late because you can't get it perfect. Perfectionism and fear of failure are correlated as many prevent success by not starting something.

One example is waiting for everything in your life to be perfect before you start your own business. Most successful entrepreneurs understand that this is not reality. In fact, every day businesses go through unexpected challenges due to human error or due to unavoidable situations.

In other words, a business isn't perfect and takes risks to be successful. If you strive always to be perfect, you will never learn to take the right risks and leap for the opportunities that are right for you.

The Fear of Failure and Success

New responsibilities or requirements that may be rewarded after the assignment is finished can be too much to process and emotionally handle. The same can be true in reverse and cause you to stall or prevent doing the task. You fear the work because it's

new, and you don't want to be wrong or fail. Not doing it at all, or using last-minute motivation to get it done, seems better than giving it your most significant try and still failing.

Fear of Criticism

No one likes being judged, especially within their own relationships and at work. It can lead to poor judgment of one's abilities and self-confidence that can further degrade your work and ability to perform. Unfortunately, not only does this lead to late or missing assignments but also to poor-quality work, due to the emotions of fear taking over your ability to perform at your best.

Dopamine Response

For some, the rush of getting work done last minute and the possible drama it can cause is a fun and exciting feeling. They do it for the dopamine rush to make their days seem more exciting or measurable. It is their way to challenge and add pressure on themselves to motivate or bring more excitement to otherwise dull work.

False Reality of the Future

In simple terms, you decide that whatever you need to do is more of a problem for your future self to worry about than today. You also tell yourself that you will know how to do it better later or have more time than you really do. Just like saying, "I will start my diet tomorrow." A false sense of reality can easily set you behind. Just because it's the future doesn't mean things will automatically improve or be less of a problem later on.

Unclear Goals, Desires, and Rewards

You simply don't care enough about the work or the reward to do it, so it's not desirable enough and it seems far-fetched or out of reach. When you don't know what you want, you can't make reliable decisions, ultimately delaying what you need to get started or finish.

Unpleasant or Humiliating Work

The work required to get the job finished is unenjoyable or physically makes you ill, anxious, or gives other discomforts. It takes a lot of determination, grit, and motivation to work on something you don't like doing. Not liking the activities involved to finish the work will persuade anyone to neglect it.

Anxiety and Depression

If a task makes you sad or anxious, it's easily avoidable. Maybe you know you need to pay a bill but are too afraid to see how much the late payment will be, or it reminds you of a traumatizing time in life that makes it hard to revisit.

Too Much to Do: Overwhelm

A widespread factor is that there is simply too much to do in the time you have to finish a job. When you stack too many tasks together, it can feel overwhelming and confusing to find a place to start. Instead of focusing or finding a way to finish the work, you concentrate on the amount and therefore run out of needed time.

Low Self-Esteem and Efficacy

You simply don't believe in your ability to get the work done or that you are the best for the task. If you think you will fail it anyway, what is the point of getting started early?

Poor Nutrition and Physical Activity

Low energy or fatigue can cause procrastination too. This is often a result of a poor diet and lack of physical exercise or underlying disease.

Keep these in mind so you can discover what is holding you back. Chronic procrastination can destroy relationships. Discovering the root cause and finding ways to solve it is the first step to improvement.

The Six Main Types of Procrastinators

While there are many causes for procrastination that can be hard to discover, many people adopt a style or habit without realizing it. Your behavior reflects the underlying reason you are procrastinating.

The following are brief descriptions of the six main types of procrastinators:

1. The Dreamer

This type of procrastinator will take hours thinking of the right plan to get the job done. Instead of acting, they make lists or reorganize their plan and schedule until they realize they have run out of time.

2. The Avoider or Anxious Worrier

This type of procrastinator will find any and all excuses to avoid getting to work, even if that means finishing a task or chore they have never done before. The avoider will find easier things to complete first or nothing at all – if it means they can avoid making mistakes or being judged for their work.

They don't trust their own skills, knowledge, or intellect to tackle the job and get it done. Instead of getting to work, they wrestle with the idea that others will probably do a better job, or it's too complicated, so they might as well give up now.

3. The Overstretched and Overachiever

You can't say no, and eventually you feel overwhelmed with the amount of work that needs to be done. You want to get work done and be reliable, so you take on too many tasks that you fail to organize appropriately. This is usually fueled by anxiety, the need to please everyone, and setting ridiculously high standards for yourself.

4. The Crisis-Maker

If you purposely push off your work and tell yourself that you like doing work last minute because it motivates you to work faster or is the only way you can get work done, then that makes you a crisis-maker type procrastinator. You believe last-minute work is the only way your brain will function and provide knowledge to get going. This is often due to boredom, frustration, or distaste for the task at hand.

5. The Perfectionist

If you can't do it exactly right the first time, you believe that you shouldn't do it at all. Instead of acting, you dwell on the task or fear getting started because you can't cope with the idea of making a mistake. If you can't be perfect, then there is no point or reason to do it. Perfectionists find it hard to achieve goals as they need everything in life to align perfectly in order to act.

6. The Resistor

You don't like or find value in the task and think your time and skills will be of more use somewhere else, leaving you to be angry and resisting the work for later. This is due to the need to control any and all situations and thinking that your time and energy could be better used elsewhere.

Keep in mind that you can fall into each style of procrastination and that these can vary as you go throughout your life.

The Consequences of Procrastination

In a perfect world, you would never feel pain, be sad, or deal with consequences and still live a successful life with peace and harmony. Unfortunately, this is not the reality. Without consequences, there would be no reason to improve or make the world a better place.

Without the reliability of other people, important things wouldn't get done to keep the world functioning. Consequences also help you recognize negative behaviors that you need to improve to ensure your happiness and those around you.

The following consequences can happen as a result of procrastination:

Poor Reputation and Reliability

In all areas of life, people really can't depend on you. And if they do, they expect it to be late or just barely on time and with a few mistakes. They certainly can't rely on you to finish last-minute work or multitask. Ultimately, procrastination leads to improper use of time and an unpredictable schedule. You continuously let others down with unkept promises while you have to attend to frequent last-minute work or tasks.

Poor Performance and Quality of Work

Rushing last minute or working on something late leads to poor performance. This doesn't leave room to review your work – meaning most projects or tasks are underwhelming, lack creativity, and can't be any better than they are because of the last-minute rush.

This means that you are unlikely to receive promotions or raises and that you will lack growth in your career. Doing the bare minimum to get by doesn't always mean success. The emotions you feel as you struggle can show throughout your work and also poorly manifest in your relationships.

Poor Physical and Mental Health

One in every five people are considered chronic procrastinators, and over time this type of behavior can cause damage to your brain and overall health. Hormones that release when you feel stressed, guilt, or regret can negatively impact your mind and body.

Regularly flushing your brain with high cortisol levels, dopamine, adrenaline, or other stress hormones and requiring your body to be in constant “fight or flight” mode is never healthy.

The following are symptoms or behaviors that can manifest as the result of chronic procrastination:

- Low energy and insomnia
- Poor self-confidence
- Depression
- Anxiety and irritability
- Weight gain
- High blood pressure
- Headaches
- Heartburn
- Low sex drive and erectile dysfunction
- Fertility problems and missed periods
- Risk of heart attack and weakened immune system

Failure to Accomplish Goals or Lack of Personal Growth and Development

When you can't finish your work, you are unlikely to have time to grow as a person. Personal time to develop strong and unique skills is often used to attend to last-minute work or feel the guilt and shame of being late. It can lead to a downward and never-ending spiral.

As you also feel guilt and shame each time you procrastinate, it will start to eat away at your self-confidence and abilities. This in turn leads to a lack of growth and fulfillment or enjoyment.

Poor Relationships with Friends, Family, and Colleagues

Your friends, family, and co-workers suffer too when you procrastinate. Lonely nights on missed dates or anniversaries, arguments, and resentments from taking on too much work are all examples of neglecting those around you due to procrastinating.

It's important to understand that not all consequences are glaringly obvious. However, that doesn't mean it's not personally affecting you somehow. You don't need to feel the pain to make it or understand it. Be mindful of your actions and consequences to not only avoid harming others but yourself too.

The next time you notice you're slipping back into procrastination, remind yourself of all the consequences, and you will be sure to get back on the right track.

How Procrastination Affects Your Relationships

You are not the only one suffering from the consequences of your actions due to procrastination. In fact, your loved ones – including your spouse, friends, siblings, and colleagues – are feeling it, and probably more than you are too. It might seem hard to believe as you stay up all night alone stressing to finish your work, but it directly affects you and everyone around you, especially if you live or work with them.

The following is how procrastination can negatively affect your relationships:

Lack of Communication and Togetherness

Not communicating or being with your partner or friends risks feelings of doubt, insecurity, and resentment, ultimately harming or ending relationships. Pushing off tasks inevitably leads to missed anniversaries, holidays, or other significant events with people who care about you.

Negative Atmosphere, Attitude, and Body Language

Procrastination breeds stress and frustration that can leak into the atmosphere and spread through your body language and onto others. This can lead to fights or cause a ripple effect of negative experiences. You already don't spend enough time with others and when you do, it's filled with arguments, mis-communication, resentment, and betrayals.

Someone Else Has to Pick Up the Slack or Take on More Responsibilities

Even if you don't notice it, people will have to pick up after you or take on more responsibilities than you in the relationship. This can cause resentment in the other that can later lead to anger and dislike. Procrastination doesn't breed good quality work.

You may have some random quality time here and there, but without the needed time to check or improve yourself, it is unlikely. When you can't keep a balanced schedule, it is likely your spouse or partner is taking on more chores around the house and experiencing a lot of everyday couple things alone.

Blame and Responsibility Is Put on Others

Often procrastinators are guilty of putting the blame and responsibility on others, usually in the form of or along with an excuse. For example, “A promotion would have encouraged me to try harder” or, “If only my spouse helped around the house more, I wouldn’t be putting it off as much.”

However, the reality is that only the procrastinator is at fault and can control or fix the situation. This results from the stress and frustration from low self-esteem and the guilt that grows as you continue to procrastinate. This behavior affects you mentally, which in turn negatively impacts your life and health.

Shows a Lack of Commitment and Care

As a result, your loved ones will no longer feel like a priority. When you stall to do things, you are choosing to put it before your relationships. Deciding to work through the discomfort or excuse for why you’re procrastinating is what you need to do to prove to your partner, friends, or family that you genuinely care. Otherwise, they will start to feel unimportant, neglected, and unworthy of your full and honest attention.

Second-Hand Stress and Other Negative Health Effects

Those around you will start to experience your stress and other adverse health effects due to the consequences of your actions. While it reflects poorly on you, too, you still get the opportunity to feel satisfied doing the bare minimum to get by, as your loved ones are left feeling neglected, unappreciated, depressed, and anxious.

Many other consequences can happen due to your actions and behaviors that are often personal and true to you. Ignoring it any longer will only lead to pain and unmet dreams; be mindful and act.

14 Ways to Overcome Procrastination and Improve Your Relationships

Thankfully, procrastination can be unlearned and should be if you want to improve your relationships and live a happier life. It starts with recognizing that this behavior will always negatively impact your happiness, success, and relationships if you don’t stop. Commitment is crucial to unlocking the mindfulness needed to change.

Commit, then adopt these following fourteen ways to overcome procrastination and improve your relationships:

#1 Learn to Recognize Your Procrastination Triggers

You need to figure out what is causing your procrastination and when. What everyday activities do you start to do? Are there any behaviors, feelings, events, or activities that repeatedly happen or are in common? Are you feeling emotional pain, trauma, fear, or anger? Are you making up excuses or finishing other less critical tasks?

To stop procrastinating, you need to notice the signs as soon as they are happening. This requires a conscious decision that you need to tell yourself first. Then develop a system that can catch you in the act and be more mindful of your procrastinating behaviors.

#2 Understand Why You Procrastinate and Discover Ways to Solve the Problem

Do you know what type of procrastinator you are? If yes, you likely know the root source of the problem and need to pay more attention to it. Face the problem head-on. Are you scared to get it wrong, do you not like the work, or is it something else wholly personal to you? Once you learn your procrastination triggers, this will be easier for you to see as the triggers are usually a result of the problem.

#3 Make Amends and Ask for Advice and Accountability

Reach out to those you want to improve your relationship with and apologize for any mistakes and wrongdoings. Own up to the fact that your procrastination got in the way of your relationship. Be specific and clear on that fact, or you won't seem genuine. If you don't truly recognize this, then you are not ready to improve your relationship nor understand your responsibility enough to improve.

If they accept your apology, let them know how you are looking to improve and how much you value their input on how to do it. Be prepared and ready to hear some harsh realities and criticisms. You must remember that this has been an emotional roller coaster for them, too, and it's going to take time, care, and dedication to make it right. If you truly care for them and value their relationship, you will understand.

#4 Ignore Your Excuses and Just Do It

After all, the only way you can change is if you act. No one else can change you for the better and end your bad habits. If you wait around for someone else to fix you or put in all the work, you won't get anywhere. People can and will want to help, but that doesn't mean they are required to do all the work for you – and they shouldn't.

When you make an excuse – whether you think it's too hard, you doubt your performance, or that others will judge, you must immediately recognize it for what it truly

is: an excuse. You are better than excuses; ignore them and keep pushing forward. Anytime you try to resist or create excuses, ignore it and just do it.

#5 Utilize Tools and Technology to Help

Use tools and technology that can send you constant reminders and force you to set strict deadlines. Add and schedule them into a calendar application. Use note pads and other applications to create daily to-do lists and break down complex assignments or errands into easier ones.

#6 Set Realistic Goals and Priorities for Yourself and with Others

If your goal is to fix your relationships, then schedule time each week with the other person to evaluate, discover, and communicate goals, priorities, and expectations. This way, you have an accountability partner and are physically showing your partner that you care and never meant to neglect or harm the relationship.

#7 The “2-Minute Rule” to Keep You from Procrastinating

This concept was developed to make things as easy as possible, just like creating baby steps. The “2-minute rule” is the idea that any good habit can be created within two minutes. Anyone can do something for two minutes.

This therefore makes excuses impossible and requires you to at least do something. If the task seems daunting and lengthy, instead, find something you can do for just two minutes, take a break, then repeat. As you accomplish tasks every two minutes, and it becomes habitual, you will gradually want to do it more or repeat the behavior.

#8 Attend Couples Counseling

Counseling will give you and your partner the tools to learn how to communicate and improve destructive behaviors more effectively. It also provides a safe space for your partner to share experiences and feelings with you about how procrastination has affected them, without the fear of a fight or judgment.

#9 Create a Reward System

Recognize each and every time you are successful and create a reward system. Make the reward something you want to work for. A long getaway vacation with your spouse or a simple date night are a couple of examples.

#10 Force Yourself to Eliminate Distractions

If you are a procrastinator, then chances are that you can't resist temptations. As a result, you need to eliminate them. Don't let yourself look at your phone and scroll through social media instead of spending time with family. Ignore your work email until you know you can get lost in it without consequences.

#11 Reflect on What You Miss Out on

If you continue to procrastinate, what kind of experience or opportunities will you miss? Is your spouse on the verge of leaving? Maybe you already missed a great business partnership with a friend. Whatever it may be, take the time to write it down and reflect on each one. Use it as motivation to continue your work and never give up or stop.

#12 Adopt a Healthy Lifestyle

Earlier, we mentioned that being in "flight or fight" mode and stressed can destroy your health. It can also be the main contributor to why you want to procrastinate. Try your best to limit processed foods, sugars, caffeine and drugs, and alcohol.

Science suggests at least eight cups of water a day for optimal hydration and about thirty minutes of vigorous exercise a day to live a long and healthy life. Before you try something new, make an appointment with a nutritionist or your physician to discover the best approach for your body, health, and lifestyle.

#13 Be Mindful and Compassionate of Others and Reflect

The fact is, chronic procrastinating will affect those around you at some point. Keep this in mind, and practice compassion. Use their pain, frustration, or disappointment to prevent you from pushing it off any longer. If you know and remember that your actions will harm their day no matter what they try to do about it, you will want to avoid the harm and pain.

With this in mind, learn ways to show that you appreciate them, especially when you let your bad habits slide. Don't in any way make excuses for your actions, as this will only continue to harm your relationship. Take ownership and reflect that you understand the pain it causes, and you appreciate their help, love, and time. Showing appreciation can help mitigate feelings have resentment and neglect.

#14 Practice Organizational and Time Management Skills

Set deadlines, keep work and personal tasks and materials separate, avoid multitasking, or get a planner to be more organized and help with time management.

The less organized you are, the more opportunity you have to fail. Set up systems that keep you organized in every area of life, and be sure always to follow it.

You're the only one who knows what needs to be done to improve. Don't let yourself be neglectful of your health, happiness, and relationships. If you allow it to take over your life, it may be too late to improve or make amends. You control your life, your thoughts, and actions, but sometimes it takes practice – so keep practicing.

Conclusion

Don't let procrastination destroy your happiness and relationships. Procrastination is preventable and can be avoided as long as you commit to working on it. Don't ignore it. Face the fact that you are a procrastinator. Discover why you are doing it and work with your loved ones to be your best and ultimately live a successful life.