

TIME MANAGEMENT

For many people, stress is caused or aggravated by time pressure - the feeling that there is too much to do in a day. Learning to manage your time is one of the most helpful ways to reduce stress. Time management involves prioritising and planning your activities as well as considering creative ways to get more out of your day. Although this in itself takes time, it is important because it saves you time (and reduces stress) in the long term. Consider the following tips:

Prioritise

List all of the tasks to do for one day (or week or month). Then label the tasks according to how important and urgent they are:

- **A tasks** – tasks that are important and need to be done immediately (e.g. crises, projects driven by deadlines)
- **B tasks** – tasks that are important but do not necessarily need to be done immediately (e.g. preparation, health and recreation)
- **C tasks** – tasks that need to be done someday but are not too important at the moment (e.g. some phone calls and errands)
- **D tasks** – tasks that are not important or urgent (e.g. watching television)

The key to effective time management is to find more time for A and B tasks and minimise the time spent on C and especially D tasks

Consider your options

In order to save time, consider the following:

- Ask yourself, “Does this task have to be done today?”. If tasks are not essential then cross them off the list BUT don’t remove items just because they are boring or unpleasant
- Ask yourself, “Is there a more efficient way to do this task?”. For example, could you write an email instead of making a lengthy phone call? Could someone else do the task? Could some tasks be shared?

- If you are worried that someone else will not do the task as well as you, ask yourself, “How likely is it that it won’t be done properly?” and “What would really happen if the other person did it wrong?”
- Identify and address reasons for procrastinating (avoiding and putting off tasks):
 - If you don’t like doing a particular task, set specific goals for completing the task (e.g. spend 2 hours on the task each day) and use strategies such as rewarding yourself to motivate you to complete the task
 - If you don’t know how to go about beginning a task, break the task into smaller sections and set dates for completion of each section. Then complete one section at a time.
 - If you are worried about the finished product not being perfect, ask yourself, “Is it better to do something reasonably than not at all?”
- Be assertive with others – practice saying ‘no’ to other’s requests if they are not essential. Ask yourself, “How likely is it that others will be angry or hate me just because I do not have time to do something for them?”

Planning

The next step is to schedule time for the tasks you have listed. Draw up a daily timetable in as much detail as possible:

- Start by allocating time for those tasks that have to be done at a specific time (e.g. attending a meeting)
- For deadline driven tasks, estimate realistically how long the task will take and work backwards from the deadline to determine when it needs to be started so that it is completed in time
- Then allocate the other tasks, giving priority to A tasks, in time slots in which you think you can do them

- Avoid scheduling all the A tasks together. Accommodate for interruptions and tasks that take longer than expected by following an A task with a B, C or D task that can be rescheduled if necessary

Just do it

- Put your plan into action
- Stick to your agenda. Do the task you set out to do and do not be distracted by other tasks that arise. Instead schedule time to do these tasks later
- Remember to schedule rewards, which may include rests or enjoyable tasks after particularly difficult job