



Breaking the Procrastination Cycle

Our energy is precious and the brain is wired to conserve it whenever possible, so it makes sense to avoid tasks that require effort, right?

Procrastination is not laziness or poor time management. It's a conscious behaviour not to do something despite the likelihood of negative consequences.

Commonly we detect a task will be uncomfortable (stressful, boring, embarrassing, frustrating) and naturally want to avoid that discomfort and find ways to put off the task. The result? The vicious cycle of procrastination: more to do > more discomfort > more motivation to avoid.

People procrastinate for all different reasons and a lot of it comes down to regulating emotions. The first step is asking yourself what the reasons or excuses are that you use to procrastinate? (e.g. fatigue, fear of failure, lacking skills, habits etc.)

If it was a simple fix, you would have broken this pattern already.

It is not simple, because it is not just laziness or a lack of motivation. It involves breaking down habits and patterns in how we think, how we feel and how we behave – each of which takes practice. Here are some tips to get started in breaking the cycle:

- ▷ **Notice and choose** - Identify those tasks you are most likely to put off and catch yourself when you start to feel the urge to procrastinate. Think about the downsides of procrastinating and why you would like to put things off less often. Choose to do things differently and have a plan.

- ▷ **Dismiss excuses and be encouraging** - We need to learn to watch out for these excuses and start to counteract them with more helpful/encouraging statements. Without this step the cycle will just continue, every time.
- ▷ **Practice tolerating discomfort** - E.g. "I can sit with this because I know future me will thank me!"
- ▷ **Adjust unhelpful rules and assumptions** - We can rewire our brain to change unhelpful rules and assumptions we have. This is one of the hardest components of tackling procrastination so don't be disheartened if it doesn't come quickly (remember our brains like the path of least effort!) It takes time and repetition to build up a new pathway. But the reward is worth it. For example, instead of "I don't have the energy for it, there's no point" try "sometimes little achievements boost my energy".
- ▷ **Use practical strategies to prepare yourself and to get started** - Write a to-do list, prioritise, break tasks down into bite-size steps, start keeping track of how long tasks really take.
- ▷ **Troubleshooting** - Experiment with a range of strategies and what works best for you.

If you would like to speak with a mental health professional about procrastination, you can access your company's Employee Assistance Provider, BSS Psychology. You can make an appointment by calling 1800 30 30 90 or request an appointment via the website bsspsych.com.au



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National and International toll-free counselling support also available 24/7
For more information, please contact:

appt@bsspsych.com.au | +61 8 9211 3700
1800 30 30 90 (AUS Freecall) | 0800 820 035 (NZ Freecall)

