

Time Management Tips & Strategies: How to Stop Wasting Time

Reviewed By: [Charles Patrick Davis, MD, PhD](#)

Reviewed on 12/17/2021

Set Goals

How do you get to where you want to go in life? Here's a time-honored time management strategy: first, you have to set goals and know what you want. Set goals for both your private and professional life. Write down what you want. Get specific. Do you want to lose 10 pounds? Spend more time with friends and family? Would you love to take up a new hobby? Jot your goals down and refer to them often to stay focused. Once you have established what your big-picture goals are, you can break them down into smaller tasks that you can consistently work towards.



Track Your Time

Some people are good with managing budgets, knowing how much money they earn and what their monthly expenses are. You can do the same accounting with your time. Keep track for a week of how long it takes you to do everyday tasks like wash a sink full of dishes, do a load of laundry, cook a meal, and make the bed. It is common for people to overestimate how long it takes to do simple tasks and underestimate how long it takes to do larger tasks. If you write down and see on paper how you are spending your time, it will help you manage it better.



Establish Priorities

We all have tasks to do of varying importance. Some things need to be done right now, other tasks need to be done soon, and others are neither important nor urgent. Write down a list of tasks and put them into one of 4 categories:

- Tasks that are important and urgent need to be done first.
- Things that are important but not urgent should be done next.
- Tasks that are not important but urgent are placed in a separate category.
- Things that are neither important nor urgent are in the final category.

You are managing your time well and minimizing stress when you have as few things in the urgent and important category as possible. Your life will feel most balanced when you spend your time on tasks that are important, but not urgent.



Keep to a Schedule

You have set your goals, tracked how you spend your time, and have prioritized what needs to be done. Now make a plan, but it is important to be flexible. Do you do your best work in the early morning or later in the afternoon? Do you like to have free time in the evenings to relax? You know yourself best. If you have a big project in the yard, do you like to do it all at once or would you rather do a little bit at a time over several days? It is best if you work with your strengths and work at times when you know you will be most productive. And if what you are doing is not working, do not be afraid to make changes until you find a schedule that is more suitable for both of your work and non-work tasks. Create a schedule that fits your needs.



Tackle Tough Stuff First

This time management tip really works; if you have a difficult task or project ahead of you, you may be tempted to put off doing the hardest parts, but it is best to get hard stuff out of the way as soon as possible. You don't want that difficult task looming over your head for the rest of the day. Time management experts recommend this strategy. It will be a relief to get difficult tasks off your plate, you will feel more productive, and you will then be freed up to take on easier parts of your project. Nothing compares to getting tough stuff out of the way first. Try it! You will find that it is a huge stress reliever.



Take Notes

You are probably familiar with the to-do list, so use it! Write down tasks and cross them off your list as you complete them. Refer to your notes often to help you be accountable to yourself and stay on track. Do not waste time. Write things down so you know what you have to do in a day, week, or month. Whatever you do, make sure your list is portable so you can make changes on the go. A pad of paper and a pen will work fine, but you probably have a calendar app or notes function in your phone if you prefer to go more high-tech.



Allot Time Carefully

Spend time on people, places, and things that matter most to you. Keep your goals in mind and ask if what you are doing at any moment is bringing you closer to your goals or taking you further away. If someone asks you to do something that you do not have time for, it is okay to say no. Your life, priorities, and time are precious. Spend your time wisely! You can adjust when necessary. Find ways to get your work done more quickly so you do not have to log hours after scheduled work times. Streamline chores at home or consider hiring help, if you can, to free up more time.



Keep Yourself Accountable

If you have created a schedule, do your best to stick to it and do not cheat. If you start a task late, you may throw off productivity for your whole day or even worse -- your whole week! If you are someone who does better with some flexibility, set aside time for tasks that are equally important. For example, if you have a free hour one afternoon a week, use it to do your filing or to catch up on emails. Remember, you can always reallocate your time as needed. Do not be afraid to make changes to the ways you spend your time.



Just Do It!

It is easy to procrastinate and find ways to distract yourself from tasks that you need to get done. Social media, TV, talking with others, and web surfing on your cell phone are common distractions. Avoid wasting time by just starting a project or task you have been putting off. If you do not feel like doing your scheduled workout, just start by at least committing to 10 minutes. You may find that you feel better once you start exercising and this may lead you to do a longer workout. By simply starting a task, you will feel better about the progress you are making. So if you are thinking about putting off a task, just don't. Change your behavior first, by starting, and then the feeling of satisfaction will propel you through to the finish line.



Use Short Breaks Wisely

Ready for another time management tip? If you are prone to wasting time, be mindful of even 10- to 15-minute periods of free time that you have throughout the day. These smaller blocks of time can easily add up to 1 free hour or more throughout a single day. What can you do in 15 minutes? Answer several emails? Return phone calls? Throw in a load of laundry? Make it a habit to use your time, no matter how short of a period, wisely. You will be surprised by how much you can get done and you will be proud that you have not put any of your time to waste.



Make Technology Work for You

Computers, smartphones, tablets, and technology can either be friends or foes. If social media is a distraction, set a time limit for how long you spend on it every day. For one time management strategy, you can make it a point to spend just a few minutes in the morning and again in the evening checking your social media accounts. Technology can be an asset if you use it wisely. Use apps and tools to help you track and schedule your time. Set alarm reminders for when you are supposed to start a task. You can even block websites that are tempting and encourage you to waste your time.



Limit Your Time

Set hard deadlines for tasks to help you stay on track. Set a maximum allowable time limit for tasks and stick to it. If you get something done sooner, great! If not, having a time limit lets you know when to quickly finish up and/or move on to the next task. Do not sacrifice time set aside for other important tasks to finish up something whose time limit has passed. It may be hard to set aside something unfinished, but doing so will help keep your schedule on track. Think of it as a way to limit time wasting.



Email: The Ultimate Time Waster

This day and age, email is a huge potential waste of time and stress. Do you find yourself staring for hours at your inbox? Take control of it! Sit and spend a few minutes every day going through your messages. Think about each message carefully? Is it spam or something you are not interested in? Delete it and/or unsubscribe from receiving future messages. If the message contains a request for you to do something that does not require a lot of time, do it quickly and move on. Does the message have a request to do something that is better done by someone else or handled in person? Forward the message to the appropriate person. If the message contains a request for you to do something that will take a bit of time, you can flag it and set it aside for later.



Take Your Lunch Break

Think you are doing a good thing by working through your lunch break? Evidence suggests you will manage your time better and get more done if you take at least a 30-minute lunch break away from work. Wanting to take a break is not a sign that you are lazy. It will actually help you work better and be more productive in the afternoon. Eat a healthy lunch. Go for a walk. Do some stretches. You will feel energized and ready to tackle the rest of your afternoon.



Schedule Fun Stuff, Too

Good time management does not just keep you on task to do the things you need to do, it also serves a more important purpose. It frees you up to do the things you love to do. You may get more sleep, spend more time with family and friends, and have more time for hobbies when you track and schedule your time. Schedule fun activities into your day, week, month, and year. This includes daily short breaks for snacks, exercise, social activities, and vacations. When you make up your mind to manage time better, it can have positive effects on every area of your life.



Sources:

This tool does not provide medical advice. [See additional information:](#)

© 1996-2021 [WebMD, LLC](#). All rights reserved.

[Source slideshow on OnHealth](#)

https://www.medicinenet.com/time_management_how_to_stop_wasting_time/article.htm