



THE
**verywell
mind
podcast**

WITH THERAPIST
Amy Morin

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227 — Friday Fix: How to Stop Procrastinating

Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast*! I'm Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I'm also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four (soon to be five) books on mental strength.

My newest book is the *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do Workbook*, and it hits the shelves on February 28th. But you can pre-order it now! It's filled with mental strength-building exercises that will help you build the mental strength you need to live your best life.

You're listening to The Friday Fix! Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Don't forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now let's dive into today's episode!

Today I'm talking about procrastination. I'll discuss why we procrastinate and some science-backed strategies for overcoming it.

First let's talk about what it is. Procrastination means that you're voluntarily delaying something even though you know there will be negative consequences for putting it off.

The most obvious example of procrastination is when a student puts off studying for a test. We've all been there. Maybe you knew the test was on Friday. You might have spent the whole week thinking about the test and knowing you should start studying yet you kept finding other things to do and you put it off until late Thursday night. Then, you may have stayed up late cramming for the test as best you could.

But, as you've likely noticed, procrastination doesn't go away when you stop having to take tests. We've likely all procrastinated household chores, making appointments, writing a report for work, working on our taxes, or tackling a stack of bills.

There are a few different theories about why we procrastinate.

The most likely reason is because we're trying to avoid an unpleasant feeling. You might feel bored when you write a report. You might feel anxious when you're doing your taxes. And you might feel nervous and frustrated when you try to start taking charge of your health by scheduling appointments for yourself.

There are lots of consequences that come with procrastination. Studies show procrastinators tend to experience a lot of guilt and dread as they put off a task. And they perform worse on those last minute things they tend to rush as compared to their counterparts.

In the worst cases procrastination can have serious consequences. I spent about five years working as a hospital social worker and I can't tell you how many times I heard patients say, "If only I had gotten help from a doctor when I first noticed I was sick. But I put it off hoping I'd feel better on my own."

As a therapist, I often heard people say very similar things about their mental health. They'd say something like, "I wish I hadn't waited years to get help for my anxiety. I could have been feeling better a lot sooner."

Consequences for procrastinating often involve trading short-term discomfort for long-term discomfort. Someone who avoids doing something right now because it feels uncomfortable, might experience more distress later. For example, you might put off

creating a presentation that you have to deliver because it's anxiety-provoking now. But, throwing something together at the last minute might cause you to experience long-term regret over not having performed well.

Interestingly, research shows people who occasionally procrastinate think differently than people who are described as chronic procrastinators.

Let's say someone puts off scheduling a doctor's appointment when they're sick. After seeing a doctor and getting treatment, an occasional procrastinator will think, "I should have seen the doctor sooner. Next time I don't feel well, I will schedule an appointment faster." A chronic procrastinator, however, is more likely to think, "Well, at least I didn't wait any longer!"

Their attempt to look on the bright side in that moment actually makes them more likely to procrastinate more in the future. It's a great example of toxic positivity—something we've discussed several times on this show.

Fortunately, whether you're a chronic procrastinator or just an occasional one, here are five things that can help you start tackling something right away:

1. Think about the uncomfortable feeling you're trying to avoid.

Spend just a minute identifying the emotion you're trying to avoid. Will making a phone call cause you to feel anxious? Will responding to your emails feel overwhelming? Will tackling a new task cause you to feel frustrated? Just naming your emotion can help take some of the sting out of it and it might help you recognize that facing that uncomfortable feeling isn't as bad as you might think.

2. Think about the uncomfortable feeling procrastinating will likely cause.

Delaying your work is going to cause you some discomfort too. You might experience guilt, dread, and anxiety if you put something off. Spend a few minutes thinking about what procrastination is going to cost you emotionally. That might convince you that the trade off isn't worth it and it might motivate you to just face the discomfort right now.

3. Talk yourself into doing it now.

Your brain will come up with a long list of reasons why you shouldn't do something right now. It might tell you that you can do it later, you deserve a break right now, and you already worked hard enough today.

You can combat those excuses by creating a list of reasons why you shouldn't procrastinate. You might write down five reasons why procrastination is a bad idea—like if I don't do this now, I won't ever get to it or I am going to perform poorly if I don't prepare.

Of course, you don't want your list to become another excuse to procrastinate. Don't spend 30 minutes writing a list about why you shouldn't delay doing the dishes.

This strategy works well with big things or with things—like why you shouldn't wait until the day before your taxes are due to start collecting your paperwork. It also works well with things you chronically procrastinate—like working out. Just keep your list handy and read it over it whenever you're tempted to procrastinate the same thing again.

4. Shift the way you think about deadlines.

Our brains categorize tasks into things we should address and now and things we should address later. And the way we organize these things in our minds is often like a calendar—and it gets a bit distorted.

Let's say it's February 15th and you have a project due March 5th. Your brain will likely tell you not to worry about that project yet because that's not due until March. If however, the date was February 5th and the project was due February 25th, your brain would be more likely to categorize that project as something you should tackle now because it's due this month.

When something isn't due until Monday, we're quick to put it off until next week because in our minds, that's a next week task, not a this week task.

We can break this habit by breaking down a big goal that we're tempted to put off into smaller, more immediate goals.

Let's take writing a book. I never set out to write a book in three months. Instead, I focus on writing one chapter a week. I still don't have to turn the book in until the deadline my publisher gave me but if I didn't create short-term goals, I'd likely put off writing the book until later.

So whether your goal is to save \$5,000 or you want to get your house organized, identify a small step you can take this week. That will help you establish a now deadline and it will increase the chances that you'll take action.

5. Use the 10-minute rule.

When all else fails use the 10-minute rule to get yourself started. Decide that you're going to work on a task for just 10 minutes. When you hit the 10-minute mark, give yourself permission to quit if you really want to. You'll likely find that you're willing to keep going.

Usually, getting started is the hardest part. But once you get things set in motion, they stay in motion.

There are other little tricks you can play on your brain too to make it a little more tempting to get started. You might see how fast you can write 200 words or you might see how many emails you can reply to in 15 minutes. Experiment with different strategies to see what works best to get your body moving.

So those are five things you can do to stop procrastinating: label the feeling you're trying to avoid, label the uncomfortable feeling you'll likely experience if you procrastinate, talk yourself into doing it now, shift the way you think about deadlines, and use the 10-minute rule to get yourself started.

If you know someone who could benefit from support as they build mental strength, share this show with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger!

Do you want free access to my online course? It's called "10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential." To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We'll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* And as always, a big thank you to my show's producer (who actually just convinced me to do something today that I was going to put off until later in the week), Nick Valentin.