

Participant Guide

Overcoming Procrastination



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Overview

Procrastination is a common challenge that can make it hard to stay on track with healthy habits, like meal planning or exercising. It might seem easier to put off making those changes, but procrastination can prevent you from reaching your health goals. In this session, we'll look at why procrastination happens, how it can impact your overall well-being, and strategies to overcome it. By the end, you'll have practical tools to help you stay motivated, build lasting habits, and take control of your wellness journey.



Understanding Procrastination

Procrastination is when you delay or put off tasks, even when you know that doing so could lead to negative consequences. It's more than just poor time management or laziness—it often comes from an inner struggle between what we know we should do and what we feel like doing. This can happen for many reasons, such as fear of failure, wanting everything to be perfect, or even just not feeling motivated. Sometimes, procrastination is linked to feeling overwhelmed, lacking self-confidence, or being stressed about the task at hand.

It's important to recognize that procrastination shows up in different ways for different people. Understanding the type of procrastination you're dealing with can help you make more intentional, healthy lifestyle choices. Let's explore the various types:

1. Active Procrastination: Some of us are **active procrastinators**—we intentionally delay tasks, believing we work better under pressure. While this might give us that short-term adrenaline boost, over time it can lead to increased stress, rushed work, and burnout. A healthier approach is to find a balance between focus and rest, so that we can produce our best work without sacrificing our well-being.

2. Passive Procrastination: Others experience **passive procrastination**, where we feel stuck, unable to take action. This often leads to frustration and guilt as the tasks pile up. If this sounds familiar, it's important to build strategies that reduce feelings of overwhelm, helping you move forward one small step at a time.

3. Perfectionist Procrastination: If you're always waiting for the “perfect” moment or the “perfect” idea, you might be dealing with **perfectionist procrastination**. This happens when fear of not meeting impossibly high standards keeps you from starting or finishing tasks. Making a lifestyle shift here means embracing imperfection and focusing on progress over perfection, which can help release the pressure you place on yourself.

Understanding Procrastination

4. Avoidant Procrastination

Some people put off tasks because they make them feel uncomfortable. This could be from a fear of failing, being rejected, or even getting into an argument. This type of delay is called *avoidant procrastination* and is often caused by negative feelings. To handle this, try to face these feelings little by little and focus on how finishing tasks can bring good results.

5. Decision Fatigue Procrastination

Have you ever felt so tired from making decisions all day that you can't make even one more? This is called *decision fatigue procrastination*. To beat it, try making your daily routine simpler and reducing the number of decisions you need to make. Setting routines or having fewer choices can help you save energy for important tasks.

6. Chronic Procrastination

When putting things off becomes a daily habit, it's called *chronic procrastination*. This means we keep delaying tasks, even when they're important, which can lead to stress and missed chances. To break this habit, try making small, steady changes—like setting clear goals and having someone to check in with you—to build better habits over time.



Identifying Personal Procrastination Triggers

To break the habit of procrastination, it helps to know what causes it. Often, procrastination comes from our feelings, thoughts, or surroundings. By noticing these patterns, we can start to build better habits. Here are some common reasons people procrastinate:

❖ **Fear of Failure**

A big reason people put things off is the fear of not doing a task well enough. If you're worried your work won't meet your own or others' expectations, it might feel easier to avoid the task. This is common for people who want things to be perfect.

❖ **Feeling Overwhelmed**

When a task seems too large or complicated, it can feel overwhelming, and you may not know where to start. This feeling can make it hard to begin. Breaking the task into smaller, easier steps can make it feel more manageable.

❖ **Perfectionism**

People who want their work to be perfect sometimes delay starting because they're afraid it won't be "just right." Realizing that making progress is more important than being perfect can help make it easier to start.

❖ **Lack of Interest or Motivation**

If a task doesn't seem interesting, it's easy to put it off. When you're not excited or don't see a purpose, procrastination can happen. Finding a way to link the task to your own goals or interests can help boost motivation.



Identifying Personal Procrastination Triggers



❖ **Distractions**

We live in a world full of things that can take our attention away—like social media, emails, phone notifications, or even tasks that seem more fun than the one we need to do. These distractions make it hard to focus on what we're supposed to be doing. Identifying your biggest distractions and setting up a space that reduces them can help you stay on track.

❖ **Low Energy or Fatigue**

When you're feeling tired, it's hard to get started or finish tasks. Procrastination might be a sign that you're not taking care of your body or mind, like not getting enough sleep, eating well, or exercising. Taking care of yourself can help boost your energy and reduce procrastination.

❖ **Unclear Goals**

If you don't know exactly what you need to do, it's hard to get started. When goals or tasks aren't clear, procrastination can happen because you don't know where to begin. Setting clear and realistic goals can help you focus and motivate you to take action.

❖ **Negative Self-Talk**

How we talk to ourselves can affect what we do. If you keep telling yourself that a task is too hard or that you're not good enough, you may put it off to avoid feeling bad. Recognizing these negative thoughts and changing them can help you feel more confident and ready to start.

❖ **Fear of Success**

Some people procrastinate because they're afraid of success. They worry about keeping up with high expectations or dealing with the changes that success might bring. Understanding that success is a good thing and can bring positive changes can help reduce this fear and make it easier to move forward.

Strategies to Overcome Procrastination

Start Small and Build Momentum

When making lifestyle changes, it's easy to want to do everything all at once, but that can feel too much and lead to putting things off. Instead, start with small steps. For example, if you want to exercise more, try a 10-minute walk instead of a long workout. These small wins will help you build momentum and make it easier to stick with your goals over time.

Set Clear and Realistic Goals

Goals like "eat healthier" or "exercise more" can be too vague and make it hard to stay on track. Set clear, realistic goals like "eat one extra serving of vegetables a day" or "work out for 30 minutes, three times a week." These clear goals give you direction and help you stay focused, making it less likely that you'll put things off.

Use Time Management Tools

When adding healthy habits to your routine, managing your time can be really helpful. Methods like the Pomodoro Technique—where you focus for 25 minutes and then take a 5-minute break—work well for activities like exercising or making meals. Breaking your habits into smaller chunks of time helps reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed and makes it easier to get started.

Create a Supportive Environment

Your surroundings can have a big effect on whether or not you stick with healthy habits. Remove distractions and set up your space to help you reach your goals. For example, lay out your workout clothes the night before or fill your kitchen with healthy snacks. A good environment makes it easier to follow through and helps reduce the urge to procrastinate.

Practice Self-Compassion

Changing your lifestyle, especially when it comes to health, can come with setbacks. Sometimes, people procrastinate because they're afraid of failing or are upset about past mistakes. Be kind to yourself and remember that progress is more important than being perfect. Focus on small improvements instead of expecting perfect results, and allow yourself to make mistakes along the way.

Strategies to Overcome Procrastination

Reward Yourself for Progress

Celebrate your successes, even the small ones. If you've stuck to your new habits for a week, treat yourself to something fun, like a relaxing bath, a movie night, or a new book. Rewarding yourself makes healthy habits feel more enjoyable and helps you stay committed to your goals, making it less likely that you'll procrastinate.

Hold Yourself Accountable

It's important to have someone to keep you on track when you're working on new habits. Share your health goals with a friend, join a fitness group, or work with a coach. When someone else knows about your progress, it can give you extra motivation to keep going. You're more likely to stick with healthy changes when you have support and encouragement.

Focus on the First Step, Not the Whole Journey

The thought of making big changes can feel overwhelming, and that often leads to procrastination. Instead of thinking about everything you need to do, just focus on starting. If your goal is to cook more meals at home, don't worry about planning every meal for the week—just think about making your next meal. Once you take the first step, it's easier to keep moving forward.



Overcoming Setbacks and Staying Resilient

When working on healthy lifestyle changes, setbacks are a normal part of the process.

It's important to remember that these setbacks aren't signs of failure, but chances to learn and grow. Being kind to yourself during tough times is key. Instead of being too hard on yourself, understand that setbacks happen when making big changes. Treat yourself with the same kindness you would show a friend in the same situation, knowing that progress isn't always smooth.

Learning from mistakes helps build strength.

Think about what caused the setback and look for patterns that might explain it. This can help you figure out what went wrong and what to do differently next time. Changing the way you think is also important. Instead of seeing setbacks as failures, see them as chances to get better. This kind of thinking helps you focus on fixing the problem and keep moving forward.

Setting realistic goals and adjusting them when needed is important.

Sometimes setbacks happen because goals are too big or hard to reach. Breaking your big goals into smaller, easier steps can help you stay motivated and celebrate little wins along the way.

In the end, practicing persistence is key.

Resilience means keeping going even when things get tough. Remember, lasting change takes time, and setbacks are a normal part of the journey. By focusing on your long-term goals and taking small, steady steps, you can overcome procrastination and keep moving toward a healthier lifestyle.



Gemma's Story

Since starting GLP-1 medication for weight loss, Gemma had been given a new lease on her health journey. Yet, despite the excitement of new possibilities, procrastination was holding her back. The days seemed to slip by as Gemma found excuses to delay her healthy habits, convincing herself that tomorrow would be a better day to start.

One evening, feeling particularly frustrated, Gemma took a deep breath and decided it was time to take action. She knew she needed a simple strategy to help her get past the procrastination that had become her daily routine. After thinking it over, Gemma decided to use a technique she had read about called the **“Five-Minute Rule.”** The idea was straightforward: commit to doing an activity for just five minutes. If she still felt like stopping after five minutes, she could. This way, starting felt less daunting, and she wouldn't have to feel overwhelmed by the task.

The next morning, Gemma set a timer for five minutes and started with a short home workout. She put on her favorite workout music, and as the timer ticked down, she began with a few simple exercises—squats, jumping jacks, and stretches. To her surprise, once the five minutes were up, she was energized and motivated to continue. The initial resistance had melted away, and she ended up exercising for a full 30 minutes.



Gemma's Story (continued...)

The Five-Minute Rule became Gemma's go-to strategy, transforming her approach to her health goals. By breaking tasks into manageable chunks, she overcame the procrastination that had previously stalled her progress. Her new routine, built on small but consistent actions, helped her embrace her healthy lifestyle changes with enthusiasm and success.

Now, let's discuss...

How might breaking your tasks into smaller, manageable chunks help you overcome procrastination in your own journey toward healthy lifestyle changes?

What are some specific healthy habits you've been putting off, and how could you apply the "Five-Minute Rule" to get started? (*see attached handout: The 5-Minute Rule*)

Summary

By figuring out what makes you procrastinate, you can start to understand why you avoid certain tasks. Once you know what's holding you back, you can take steps to fix it. Whether it's overcoming fear, managing distractions, or making your goals clearer, noticing these patterns is the first step toward being more productive.

Using the strategies from this session to beat procrastination can help you make healthy changes that are easier to keep up with. Remember, real change happens with small, steady actions over time. With patience, kindness to yourself, and focusing on making progress, you'll be able to move past procrastination and create the healthier life you want.



Keep Moving

A simple tip to overcome procrastination and start exercising is to commit to just **five minutes**. Tell yourself you'll exercise for only five minutes, whether it's a quick walk, stretching, or a few bodyweight exercises. Often, once you get started, you'll feel more motivated to keep going. The key is to make the first step easy and approachable, which helps break the mental block and build momentum.

“The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

— Walt Disney

Summary

Activities

- Put one of the strategies offered in the handouts from this session—either the Pomodoro Method, the 5-Minute Rule, or Temptation Building—into practice to support a healthy lifestyle choice, such as eating healthier or exercising more regularly.
- Visualization and Reward Challenge:
 - Choose a task you've been procrastinating on. Take 2 minutes to close your eyes and imagine yourself completing it. Picture how good it will feel when it's done.
 - Then, set a small reward for yourself after completing the task (e.g., enjoying a cup of coffee, reading a chapter of a book).
 - Did visualizing success help you feel more motivated? How did the reward affect your willingness to complete the task?
- Leverage peer support to create accountability. Pair up with a partner, family member or friend and share one task you've been procrastinating on. Set a specific deadline for completing it, and agree to check in with each other at that time. This task could be related to preparing a healthy recipe, meal planning or prepping, or exercise related like a walk or jog.
- **Goal Setting:** Set one goal associated with this session. Example: "I will take a 10-minute walk after dinner on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday this week."

Discussion/Questions

- What do you think is the main reason you procrastinate when it comes to making healthier lifestyle choices (e.g., exercising or eating better)? How can understanding this help you overcome it?
- Procrastination often happens when we lack immediate motivation, but setting up a reward system can help us take action. How can rewarding yourself after completing a healthy habit (e.g., finishing a workout or meal prepping) motivate you to stick with it? What's a small, meaningful reward you could give yourself?

Pomodoro Method

By breaking tasks into short, focused intervals with breaks, the Pomodoro Method helps combat procrastination and builds lasting habits. It involves working in **25-minute intervals** (called "Pomodoros") followed by a **5-minute break**. After completing four Pomodoros, take a longer break of 15–30 minutes.

How it Works:

1. **Set a Timer for 25 Minutes:** Choose a healthy task (meal planning, meal prep, or exercise routine) and dedicate 25 minutes of focused work to it.
2. **Work Without Distractions:** During this time, avoid distractions like phones or emails.
3. **Take a 5-Minute Break:** After 25 minutes, take a short break to recharge.
4. **Repeat:** After completing four Pomodoros, reward yourself with a longer break.

How to Use the Pomodoro Method for Healthy Lifestyle Changes

Healthy Eating

- **Meal Prep:** Use the Pomodoro method to make meal prepping less overwhelming. Spend 25 minutes chopping vegetables, cooking, or portioning meals, followed by a 5-minute break.
- **Mindful Eating:** Practice mindful eating by dedicating 25 minutes to enjoying your food, focusing on each bite, and avoiding distractions like TV or phones.

Exercise

- **Short Workouts:** Break down your workout into manageable chunks, like doing 25 minutes of bodyweight exercises followed by a 5-minute rest. Repeat this for longer workouts.
- **Overcoming Resistance:** For days when you're feeling unmotivated, commit to just one Pomodoro of exercise. Often, getting started is the hardest part, and you might find that you want to keep going after the first 25 minutes.

Healthy Routines

- **Habit-Building:** Use the Pomodoro method to establish new healthy habits, like journaling, stretching, or preparing healthy snacks. Dedicating small, focused blocks of time can help reinforce these routines daily.

Temptation Building

Temptation Building is a strategy where you pair something you *want* to do (a tempting activity) with something you *should* do (a beneficial but often procrastinated task). This method leverages your desires to motivate positive actions and can be a powerful tool for forming healthy habits.

Create a "temptation bundle" by combining a fun or enjoyable activity with a healthy habit you want to adopt. By linking the two, you reduce the mental resistance to starting the healthy behavior, making it easier to follow through.

Examples of Temptation Building for Healthy Habits

Exercise:

Pair your workouts with something enjoyable, like watching YouTube videos, listening to an audiobook, or catching up on podcasts.

Healthy Eating:

Use a TV show, playlist, or phone call to motivate yourself while preparing nutritious meals or packing healthy snacks.

Staying Active at Home:

Save a favorite TV show for when you do household chores or simple exercises, like squats or lunges, during commercials.



Quick Tips for Success:

- Keep it simple—pair small healthy actions with enjoyable activities.
- Choose "want" activities that don't distract too much from your "need" tasks.
- Be consistent to form lasting habits

The 5-Minute Rule

The 5-Minute Rule is a quick and easy technique that helps you overcome procrastination by committing to a task for just 5 minutes. The idea is that once you start something, you'll often feel motivated to keep going—getting past that initial barrier to action.

Steps to Use the 5-Minute Rule

- **Choose a Healthy Habit You Want to Start**
Identify a health-related task you've been procrastinating on, like going for a walk, cooking a healthy meal, or doing yoga.
- **Set a Timer for 5 Minutes**
Tell yourself you only need to work on that task for 5 minutes. That's it—just commit to those 5 minutes and nothing more.
- **Start the Task**
Once you begin, focus fully on the activity for those 5 minutes. Whether it's stretching, prepping ingredients for a meal, or doing a quick workout, give it your attention.
- **Decide What's Next**
After 5 minutes, ask yourself if you want to continue. You can stop if you want—but often, getting started will give you the motivation to keep going!

