



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to:

# Procrastination

Procrastination is a complex psychological behavior that affects everyone to some degree or another. For some procrastination is just a once-in-a-while nuisance; for others, it is a constant nemesis which causes a person a great deal of unnecessary anxiety. According to [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com), over 20 percent of the American population are procrastinators. Currently there is no evidence that gender and intelligence have anything to do with a tendency to procrastinate. Age may have something to do with it. A recent study has found that procrastination begins in the middle to late twenties, decreases for the next forty years and then increases again in the sixties.

Procrastination has a powerful affect on a person's thoughts, feelings, physical health, behavior, and overall functioning. Symptoms often include: craving diversion, ineffective working, last minute rushing, missed deadlines, difficulty in making a start on a piece of work or revision, nagging guilt, dis-appointment, self-disgust, stress, and depression.

There are several different theories as to what causes a person to procrastinate. According to Joseph Ferrari, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Chicago's De Paul University, "Studies show that the procrastination trait comes from the kinds of interactions we have with our parents when we are young." Most commonly procrastinators come from households with an authoritarian father, men who are cold and stern. Their children turn to putting off tasks as a form of rebellion. It is a coping strategy at home that doesn't help them in the outside world. The behavior then becomes part of them and over time they begin to rationalize things in different ways.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Depression
- Self-doubt
- Stress
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of inadequacy
- Low self-confidence
- Poor health
- Strained relationships
- Talking without acting
- Time-wasting behavior
- Inability to reach important goals in life
- Not enjoying recreational activities
- Working rapidly at the "last minute"

Other reasons for procrastinating include: poor time management, inability to prioritize, overload of tasks at a specific time, anxiety about a task, difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, and avoidance of things that are disliked and/or difficult.

Researchers suggest that there are three types of procrastinators:

- **THE THRILL SEEKERS:** THESE INDIVIDUALS GET A RUSH OF EUPHORIA BY WAITING TO DO THINGS AT THE LAST MINUTE. THE REASONS THEY OFFER FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR TEND TO RELATE TO EXTERNAL CAUSES: "I WAS BUSY AT WORK." IT SOUNDS PLAUSIBLE AND NO ONE CAN VERIFY IT.
- **AVOIDERS:** THESE INDIVIDUALS OFTEN FEAR FAILURE OR SUCCESS. THEY ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK OF THEM. THEY'D RATHER HAVE THE WORLD THINK THEY LACK EFFORT THAN LACK ABILITY. THE REASONS THEY GIVE FOR THEIR BEHAVIOR HAS TO DO WITH MATTERS THAT ARE INTERNAL: "I DON'T LIKE SHOPPING."
- **DECISIONAL PROCRASTINATORS:** THEY CAN'T MAKE UP THEIR MIND, AND OFTEN LET OTHERS MAKE DECISIONS FOR THEM.



# Can A Counselor Help Someone Who Procrastinates?

Perhaps the best way to identify whether or not your suffering from a procrastination problem is to ask yourself if your procrastinating behavior is in anyway negatively affecting your life. If the answer is yes, you may want to explore treatment options.

Jill Lowery, L.P.C.C., a licensed professional clinical counselor at Portage Path Behavioral Health in Akron says, "A counselor can help a client develop a range of techniques to promote a change in thinking and avoidance behavior. Behavioral health professionals can also help clients discover if their procrastinating behavior is a symptom of an underlying emotional issue, such as low self-esteem, personality disorders, and/or substance abuse disorders."



## How To Cure Procrastination

1. Try breaking down a task into small units that can be tackled individually.
2. Practice the art of backwards planning. Start with your deadline and work backwards from there. To be done on a certain date, think about where you need to be in the task during the week before, and after that, and so on. Write out all the separate tasks that are a part of the project. Working on the whole project may feel overwhelming, while completing a one-hour task is simple.
3. Once you have divided a big project into small units, you can reserve some time every day to work on one of these. Don't be fooled into thinking that you always need large uninterrupted blocks of time to make progress on an important project.
4. Make a list of everything that needs to be done on a project that can be completed in no more than ten minutes. Not only will these seem manageable, but mini jobs can be fit into odd moments throughout the day.
5. Use the "to do" lists and put them in order of priority. Do what you can for the day and don't criticize yourself when the lowest priority items have not been completed. The trick is to complete the highest priorities first. Don't get misled into thinking that you have really had a productive day when all you have done is a series of activities from the bottom of your priority list.
6. Acknowledge your fears and go ahead anyway. Many people find it useful to think about what it is they are afraid of and then imagine the worst that could happen to them if they acted. Instead of allowing in self-pity and criticizing the person who assigned you the task, take the initiative to talk about your concerns.
7. If the problem is failure to take action, you may need to take a look at what you are telling yourself about the hazards of action. Are you saying that not being able to do well means you are incompetent? If one potential friend turns you down, does that mean that you are not a likeable person? Does one confrontation signal the end of a relationship?

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

<b>Web Site</b>	<a href="http://www.portagepath.org">www.portagepath.org</a>
<b>Appointments</b>	330-253-3100 800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

<b>Support Hotline</b>	330-434-9144 888-434-8878
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