- Exercise / Diet

What's keeping you from exercising and dieting?

How to overcome persistent procrastination

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It's a holiday and you have no plans. Will you exercise for one hour or stay in bed the whole day? We have a tendency to delay doing things we don't like to do, especially if it's related to diet and exercise. "I will start tomorrow" you say, but when tomorrow comes, your plans don't happen.



Procrastination is the voluntary delay of an action despite expecting the outcome to be worse due to the delay. A persistent procrastinator knows the importance of living a healthy lifestyle and losing weight. They want to exercise and eat healthy. Unfortunately, they cannot seem to get started.

Persistent procrastinators keep putting off what they have to do today.

What could be the obstacles preventing them from exercising and choosing healthier food?

Procrastination is perceived as a sign of laziness or idleness. On the contrary, it's a voluntary choice of an activity or behavior over one that is more beneficial or productive. It isn't just about diet and exercise, persistent procrastinators also put off tasks such as going for checkups, submitting documents, and the like.

All of us are guilty of procrastinating in one way or another. Being a chronic procrastinator, however, is a whole different story. While procrastination is not considered a mental health condition, studies have shown that it is linked to mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Professor of psychology at Depaul University in Chicago, Dr. Joseph Ferrari and colleagues, estimated 20 to 25 percent adult men and women around the world are chronic procrastinators. "Everyone procrastinates, but not everyone is a procrastinator," said Dr. Ferrari.

Persistent procrastinators have turned procrastination into a lifestyle. They put off tasks until the last minute, often leading to anxiety and distress. They favor activities that are more pleasant in the short-term while being detrimental in the long run.

Piers Steel gave some reasons behind this irrational behavior in his research entitled: "The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure."

Task aversion. The individual finds the activity unpleasant or aversive. He or she will do anything to avoid doing it. An example would be going to the gym. It takes physical and mental effort to work out. You will experience tiredness and body aches. Therefore, you choose to be comfortable being a couch potato instead.

Low self-efficacy. Due to lack of confidence in accomplishing a goal, the individual avoids it. You doubt you can thrive on fruits to get your sugar fix during snack time so you choose to eat cookies and tell yourself that you will just make a healthier choice tomorrow. After all, you need your mood boosting sugar because you're stressed from work.

Lack of immediate reward. Impulsiveness, boredom, and instant gratification are more important than sustainable, long-range planning. Many quit after a few days of diet and exercise because they don't see changes in their weighing scale. This is the reason crash dieting is so popular. We all want instant results, but they aren't sustainable.

Distractibility. This happens when an individual has poor organizational and self-regulatory skills. Self-regulation is the ability to manage behavior and reactions to feelings and circumstances. For example, when one is in a foul mood, that person can resort to emotional eating instead of learning how to manage emotions by choosing something that is beneficial like taking a walk, talking to someone, or engaging in calming activities through prayer and meditation.

Here's how to say goodbye to procrastination.

Setting mini goals. Long-term planning isn't motivating for persistent procrastinators. It would be best to assign small tasks. Instead of having a goal of one hour exercise per day, begin by taking 10-minute walks. As you get used to walking, gradually increase the duration and frequency.

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Doing it slowly. When it comes to diet, instead of going cold turkey on your treats, try to cut down on portions. Gradually include fruits and vegetables in your diet. You can commit to eating just one fruit a day and decrease your intake of chocolate to half a bar or just have a handful of chips instead of consuming the entire bag. You can also begin to have one vegetable dish a day if you are a meat-eater.

Using reminders. Set an alarm for your 10-minute walk. Place fresh fruits on the table where it is easy to grab. Put a sign on the pantry or fridge to remind you not to overindulge in sweets.

Using rewards. Instead of expecting significant weight loss as a reward after exercising a couple of days, think of other benefits, like having more energy or looking less bloated. After a stressful day, reward yourself with a hot bath or have an early downtime and sleep more. Have a fruit smoothie instead of a slice of cake. Don't turn to unhealthy food as a reward.

Don't be suspended in time. Take control of your procrastination. If you are struggling, it is best to seek professional help and counseling.