

Shake off 'I don't

You really CAN get it all done! Here, experts reveal secrets that'll help you speed through your daily do's so you can carve out the time and space to do what purely delights YOU

Today was the day you were finally going to sit down and write those thank-you notes for your anniversary party. But one interruption after another kept getting in the way. And now that it's suddenly bedtime, you're wondering if this task will keep playing leapfrog across your calendar pages all week.

The all-too-familiar feeling that we never have time to accomplish our goals can quickly drain our mental energy and ratchet up anxiety. A big part of the blame for this goes to the increasingly busy world we live in—constantly juggling different tasks can make our attention span shrink like a sweater that got stuck in the dryer! In fact, studies show we can only focus for 11 minutes on average before becoming distracted.

Another reason we feel time-starved may surprise you, says life coach Meadow DeVor. "We often intentionally try to stay overly busy to distract ourselves from emotional wounds, such as guilt or loneliness." The good news? Research suggests the happiest, most productive people have one thing in common: Instead of trying to be the boss of their calendar, they've learned to take command of their *attention span*.

"Making conscious timing decisions is proven to reduce stress significantly," assures Daniel Pink, author of *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*. Just read on for the secrets that'll help you make the most of *your* time!

have time'-itis!

TIME TRAP

Feeling drained

You wearily jotted down your weekend chores over your lunch break, but now that you're looking at the list, you feel exhausted before you've even started. If we even *think* about upcoming projects when our mind isn't alert and energized, our resolve wilts, notes Pink. "Our level of brainpower changes over the course of the day," he explains. "And the difference between the high point of peak productivity and the low point can be huge."

TIME SAVER

Tap your 'power hours'

Tackling your most important work during the productivity pinnacle of your day will instantly make you feel more "time rich," says Pink. For example, if you're an early bird, start analytical tasks (like updating your résumé) in the morning, when you're most focused. If you're a night owl, wait until the sun sets. Not sure if you're a lark or an owl? Just pinpoint when you feel most mentally alert on a "free day," like Sunday, when *you're* in charge of your schedule.

TIME TRAP

Trouble prioritizing

You'd love to start taking daily walks to boost your health, but finding time to fit this new routine into your schedule feels more like a pipe dream than a realistic goal. "When we're overwhelmed, we easily lose sight of long-term objectives and have a much harder time prioritizing," says Judy Ho, Ph.D., author of *Stop Self-Sabotage*. "This stress is strongest when we lose sight of why we're striving to get something done in the first place."

TIME SAVER

Focus on your *why*

Identifying your *internal* rewards for prioritizing a task boosts success. In fact, Yale researchers found that West Point cadets who focused on internal motivators (like a desire to lead), rather than external incentives (like getting a job) were more likely to graduate. The key? Remind yourself of your values, like staying healthy and energetic for your grandkids, says Ho. This helps you focus on the *real* reason you're exercising, so it feels much easier to prioritize.

TIME TRAP

Procrastinating

You've known for a few weeks that you have to clean out your late aunt's old office, but you've been delaying this difficult task because you know just how emotionally tough it will be. "Often, the more meaningful the activity, the more we put it off," observes DeVor. "Delay is a common defense mechanism and is almost always about control—a reaction to fear and an attempt to avoid the discomfort of uncertainty."

TIME SAVER

Cure it with kindness

When postponing an important task, instead of trying to will your behavior to change, get *curious* about why you may be delaying, advises DeVor. Perhaps cleaning out your aunt's office means that you'll have to face your grief. "Procrastination, however, will only lift through self-compassion," she says. "Simply offer yourself love. Place your hands over your heart and repeat: *I'm on your side*. This gently affirms that you can begin, and it *will* be okay."

TIME TRAP

Putting yourself last

Like the empty carton of ice cream you just discovered in the freezer, your time lately seems to have been gobbled up by everyone else in your life. And now your neighbors want you to become president of the homeowners' association and your friends are asking you to volunteer for the library fundraiser. Observes DeVor, "When I or my students say we 'never have enough time,' what we really mean is that we want a way to find time for *ourselves* without having to feel guilty or selfish."

TIME SAVER

Give yourself permission

Long-term happiness requires truly accepting a simple truth: *Your* time is precious, declares DeVor. The first step to reclaiming this commodity is not wasting a moment on guilt. To start letting go of unfair self-recriminations, just try a relaxing visualization: Close your eyes and picture feeling at peace as you tell a friend 'no' to an upcoming demand on your time. Practicing a specific action plan, such as saying, "My plate is full—if I said yes, I'm afraid I'd let you down," increases the likelihood that you'll follow through. And the more you set specific boundaries, the more "time freedom" you'll enjoy.