



Overcoming Procrastination, the Thief of Time

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Making smart choices is one of the most important parts of promoting good health and well-being. This is not breaking news to health practitioners such as CRNAs. They are aware that avoiding risky behaviors such as using tobacco and drugs or abusing alcohol—even driving without a seat belt—can save lives and improve health. Further, changing habits and behaviors can reduce the chance of illness and injury; even washing one’s hands regularly prevents the spread of many common illnesses and infections.

In addition, studies have shown that changing behaviors, even after many years of neglecting our physical and mental health, can significantly reduce the long-term impact on well-being.

However, understanding the need to take care of ourselves doesn’t necessarily mean that we can find the motivation to do what we know we should do. Getting and staying healthy requires personal commitment. Making wellness a priority is a major challenge, usually defined by a lack of time and energy or the mental attitude to make difficult lifestyle changes.

Procrastination is defined as “delaying, deferring, or putting off an action,” and we are all guilty of it at times. There are many reasons for procrastinating: anxiety about the task, feeling negative about the outcome, or perceiving the task as too difficult. Procrastination can be a symptom of not having clearly defined goals. In both our personal and professional lives, procrastination can cause stress, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy, particularly if issues remain unresolved or tasks uncompleted. Procrastination can make us feel unproductive, undisciplined, or overwhelmed.

Motivation is a complex issue, with a diverse number of causes and solutions. For example, some researchers postulate that behavior results from instincts that are present at birth. Others note that behavioral change comes from a desire to avoid pain or to achieve pleasure. The self-control of motivation is increasingly understood to be a subset of emotional intelligence. Other theories are based upon driving forces associated with a compelling need or deficiency, a lack of praise or approval, or basic safety and security. The familiar and

more prevalent concept is Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs theory in which human behavior is influenced by wants and desires from the most basic to complex; from finding food and shelter to self-actualization.

Building upon Maslow, the self-determination theory focuses on the importance of innate tendencies toward personal growth and development. Further, the importance of goal setting as a means of motivation is based upon the concept that individuals have a desire to achieve clearly defined purposes. Simply desiring a challenging result is not always enough. Without a substantial possibility of reaching the goal, people are not optimally motivated. Sometimes we settle for an easier choice, which can increase our discomfort because we know that while the outcome brings pleasure another choice is preferable or more appropriate.

SMART Goals

Aristotle once noted that we are what we repeatedly do. Your success may not depend upon the brilliance of your plan, but upon the consistency of your actions and adhering to the intended path to get there. The most basic and effective manner to avoid delays and support your motivational efforts is to develop realistic goals. These may depend on the circumstances, situational environment, or desire for personal fulfillment. Goals allow you to hit milestones along the way to results. They help you stay focused, keep it simple, and allow you to stick to plan. Goals should be:

- **Specific**—well defined and focused. What will be accomplished?
- **Measurable**—take a hard look in the mirror. Assess willingness to change. Set small goals.
- **Achievable**—something you can reach. Monitor your progress and know when you have reached your target. Understand you are responsible for controlling the outcome.
- **Relevant and Realistic**—need to be appropriate to overall purpose and desires. Dream big, but understand the limits of possibility.
- **Time-framed**—deadlines for accomplishment. Take small steps with interim rewards to avoid derailment.

Consider your own Lifestyle.

Health is a term that refers to a combination of the absence of illness, the ability to cope with everyday stressors and activities, physical fitness, and a high quality of life. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that “health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Others consider health to be a continuous adjustment to changing demands of living and subject to improvement by individual effort.

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Each of us has tried to avoid dealing with an unpalatable task or bad habit. If something is unpleasant and emotionally or physically painful, it is a natural human reaction to delay what we know needs to be done. Many of us are familiar with feelings of disappointment and self-reproach when faced with inaction concerning things that are not easy or enjoyable. We all tend to wait for the right moment to start making adjustments in lifestyle, getting rid of old habits, or listening to our own intelligence about doing the right thing. Yet, we all procrastinate, particularly when it comes to our own health and well-being.

Change a Habit—Save Your Life

Simple behavior changes can prevent devastating outcomes and save lives. Overcoming procrastination takes work and is not always easy. But, a few small changes can quickly lead to healthy improvements. Making smart choices and avoiding negative behaviors such as the following may prevent injuries and death:

Alcohol

Misuse and abuse of alcohol continue to be a problem in this country. Alcoholic beverages supply calories but few nutrients and are harmful when consumed in excess. The effects of alcohol abuse can be devastating, including adverse health consequences, domestic abuse, and drinking and driving.



Substance Abuse

The anesthesia profession is at high-risk for substance abuse. Reports indicate that more than 10 percent of nurse anesthetists are likely to be addicted to drugs and alcohol. A recent report from the Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicates that the baby boomer generation use of illicit drugs has increased.

Smoking

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States, causing more than 440,000 premature deaths annually during 1995-1999. Smoking can cause chronic lung disease, coronary heart disease, and stroke. Smoking has also been linked to cancer of the lungs, larynx, esophagus, mouth, and bladder. In addition, smoking contributes to cancer of the cervix, pancreas, and kidneys. Smokeless tobacco and cigars also have deadly consequences, including lung, larynx, esophageal, and mouth cancer.



Marijuana

Regular marijuana use may also cause many of the same respiratory problems as regular tobacco use. Some of the respiratory problems associated with marijuana use include daily cough and phlegm, symptoms of chronic bronchitis, and more frequent chest colds. Continuing to smoke marijuana can lead to abnormal functioning of lung tissue. Research shows that marijuana harms the brain, heart, lungs, and immune system and limits learning, memory perception, judgment, and the ability to drive an automobile.

Inactivity and Poor Eating Habits

Physical exercise and proper nutrition are important components of prevention and health promotion. Both may boost the immune system, reduce surgical risks, build healthy bones, and reduce the potential for cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity.

Neglecting to Wear Safety Belts

Thousands of people needlessly die in traffic accidents yearly because they do not use safety belts. Seat belts are the most effective means of reducing fatalities and serious injuries in a traffic accident. In fact, seat belts save over 10,000 lives in America every year. Appropriate bicycle safety measures could also reduce the 690 fatalities and 51,000 traffic-related injuries that occur every year. Bike helmets reduce head injury risk by 85 percent.



For healthcare providers, taking wellness for granted is not an option! Taking care of ourselves must be a priority. Getting and staying healthy is an investment, essential for providing safe patient care as well as for us to enjoy life to its fullest. ■

The beginning is the most important part of the work.

Plato

Resources

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