Do you tend to procrastinate? Procrastination keeps you from starting, working on, or finishing important tasks. But why do you procrastinate? By looking at the reasons you put things off, you will make valuable discoveries about yourself that can help you put an end to procrastination.

Dr. Burns in *The Feeling Good Handbook* (1989) gives 10 Reasons Why People Procrastinate:

1. **Putting the cart before the horse.** Most procrastinators believe that you must feel motivated in order to begin a task. If you wait until you feel motivated or “in the mood” you may never start the task, especially if it is boring or unpleasant. Action comes first before motivation.

2. **The mastery model.** Do not assume that successful people easily achieve their goals. Most people endure frustration, self-doubt, and overcome obstacles to achieve their personal goals. If you think that it should be easy without setbacks and struggles, you could conclude that something is wrong and give up.

3. **The fear of failure.** Procrastinators might believe that trying hard and failing is worse than not trying. They can rationalize it by saying “I really did not try, so I truly did not fail”. Or, “I could have done better if I had had more time.” Procrastination is a way to protect them from the possibility of perceived “real failure”. For some people their self-esteem is based on the success of their accomplishments. Or for others, family expectations and standards set by parents may be so high that no one could actually live up to them. Their fear may be so great that they would rather do nothing than risk failure. Consider that the problem is actually the unrealistic standards that have been set, not the failure to meet them.

4. **Perfectionism.** Trying to do things perfectly can put pressure on people and cause them to feel so stressed that they procrastinate. Instead of doing nothing at all, try to relax and just do your best. If you at least get started on the task, you can always go back later to work on improving the quality.

5. **Lack of rewards.** Procrastinators tend to put themselves down and not give themselves credit for what they do. Feeling rewarded for your efforts is a great motivator.

6. **“Should statements.”** Procrastination is often associated with obligation – feeling pulled between what you “should do” and what you want to do. Saying that you should or ought to do something could make the task seem unimportant or not urgent.

7. **Passive aggressiveness.** Procrastination can be a tool for passive aggressiveness – not expressing negative feelings openly and directly. Your true feelings may come out indirectly through procrastinating on things that others will find frustrating. Example: Chronically showing up late for group projects because you are annoyed with your project leader.

8. **Unassertiveness.** Be assertive and don’t agree to do things that you don’t really want to do and don’t give in to unreasonable demands from others. Otherwise, you may get overcommitted and procrastinate.
9. **Coercion sensitivity.** Procrastination may be a form of rebelling against people who are making unreasonable demands or coercing you into doing a task. Delaying tactics can be a form of rebellion against imposed schedules, standards, and expectations. This strategy hurts you more than whatever or whomever you are rebelling or resisting (i.e. getting the bad grade, loss of self-respect, etc.).

10. **The lack of desire.** This is probably the most common cause of procrastination. You procrastinate simply because you don’t want to do the task. This could be because of a lack of interest. There are times in life when you will have to do things that you don’t like or want to do. If your natural interests are not stimulated, one solution to procrastinating might be to “just do it”. This will give you more “guilt-free” time to do those things that are more interesting to you.

Understanding the reasons why you procrastinate can help you put the problem into a different perspective. Perhaps your reasons are good ones. Maybe the task is not a high priority. Or, you realize that it is your family and friends who are encouraging you to pursue a goal that you are not committed to or isn’t quite right for you. Once you have analyzed the situation you may discover that you never want to do the task you’ve been putting off. However, if the analysis shows that it is to your benefit to get started on the task then develop a plan.

### TIPS TO OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

1. Identify the reasons why you are procrastinating on completing a task.
2. Seek help to overcome any self-defeating problems such as fear and anxiety, or perfectionism.
3. Identify your own goals, values and priorities.
4. Ask yourself if your goals realistic? Are your actions consistent with your goals, values, etc.?
5. Develop a plan for completing goals/projects. Outline the smaller steps needed to complete the project or reach your goal.
7. Reward yourself after completing a task. The bigger the accomplishment the bigger the reward should be.