

# How managing your schedule can help you stay well



Decision fatigue is the decline in energy and focus you experience after making decisions or engaging in mundane tasks. This mental drain can cause you to seek immediate rewards, which can lead to poor decision making and inefficient or irrational behavior.



Here are five ways you can manage your daily schedule to stay focused and positive throughout the day.



# 1

## Tackle draining tasks earlier in the day

We all have tasks we dread on our to-do list. Maybe it's mind-numbing administrative work, or some unpleasant emails we've been putting off. When our ego-strength and glucose levels start to run low, these tasks can become extremely frustrating and exhausting. Scheduling some of these tasks for earlier in the day can increase productivity, decrease frustration, and ensure unpleasant tasks aren't weighing on our mind.

# 2

## Eat healthy meals or snacks to replenish glucose throughout the day

Caffeine, adrenaline, or exercise may keep our physical energy up throughout the day, but they can still leave our willpower and mental energy depleted, leading to procrastination and a lack of focus. The brain, like the rest of the body, derives its energy from glucose, the simple sugars your body extracts from most food.

Eating fruits and healthy cereals (those without hidden, added or processed sugars) for breakfast, lunch, or a midday snack can help replenish glucose levels while avoiding "sugar crashes" and other negative consequences from refined sweets.

# 3

## Eliminate unnecessary decisions from your daily activities

We may not notice it through the day, but each small, inconsequential decision we make can drain us of our ability to make large, important decisions. Things as simple as what to eat for breakfast, or what to wear in the morning, can limit our ability to exert self-control or focus on important matters at work. Removing these decision-points from our daily schedule can often lead us to work more effectively and efficiently.

If you crave variety and don't relish the idea of eating or wearing the same thing every day, make weekly wardrobe and meal choices on a Sunday evening, and then put them out of your mind.

# 4

## Take breaks between willpower-draining tasks

Being cognizant of the type of work we're doing can help us more effectively schedule our tasks. Creative work, such as brainstorming potential legal strategies, or drafting legal memos or arguments, uses different mental faculties than administrative or repetitive tasks. When we reach our limit on mundane tasks, we can help recover by turning to more creative endeavors.

Spacing out challenging tasks throughout the day can help us maintain energy. Similarly, taking a short walk and stepping away from the desk can help rejuvenate our ability to focus on the task at hand.

# 5

## Identify and distinguish "routine" activities from "creative" ones

While this article has focused on the downsides of "routine" work, there are ways to take advantage of these tasks as distinct from a lawyer's more "creative" responsibilities.

For example, it is often easier to achieve "flow," when engaging in routine or mundane tasks. "Flow" is a mental state where you are fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus and enjoyment of the current activity. "Flow" is more likely to occur when there are clear goals (such as a series of known tasks to be completed) and where you can receive immediate feedback and assess progress. In some legal matters, it's possible to convert "creative" tasks (where flow is difficult because the goals and progress are vague) with "routine" tasks by using checklists. PracticePRO provides an online repository of checklists that can assist practitioners in more efficiently working through files.

Additionally, time-management approaches such as the "pomodoro" technique (where you do constant work for 25 minutes and then take a 5-minute break) are designed to help focus on menial and non-creative tasks. They are less effective at increasing productivity when the tasks are highly creative or ill-defined. The use of checklists, however, can convert a "creative" task, into a "routine" one that is more appropriate for these techniques.

Being aware of the ways creative versus routine tasks can slow us down or limit our productivity can allow us to schedule our days in efficient ways that take advantage of the ways our minds work and when we are best able to tackle certain tasks. Avoiding procrastination and burnout can help keep both our minds and our bodies healthy. ■