

‘TO-DO’ LISTS WITH A TWIST
by Alison Waines

Overwhelmed with tasks? Not enough hours in the day?

This is a useful exercise when too many jobs are getting on top of you.

Use a sheet of paper, or PC document, divided into three columns. On separate lines, list all the things you can think of that need to be done, numbering each task as you go. You might include only ‘work’ tasks, or it could be domestic chores or other specific tasks (such as planning for a holiday) or you can list *all* the tasks you know need to be done at the present time.

Then in the second column mark down approximately *how long* you think this particular task will take you - it might be five minutes or two hours. In the third column mark down the deadline by which time this task needs to be completed.

It might look something like this:

TASK	TIME it will take	DEADLINE
1. Prepare presentation for conference	50 minutes	end of Thursday, (18 th)
2. Finish report	20 minutes	lunchtime today
3. Get better quote for house insurance	40 minutes	next Friday (26 th)

When you look at your entire list, check out what can be realistically achieved in one day. For example, if the anticipated time required for completing all the tasks on your list comes to 36 hours, with around 15 waking hours available in the day, you’ll have at least 21 hours of tasks left-over, uncompleted.

Don’t forget too, that while on paper you might have 15 hours of time, you will also need time for other things not on your list, such as eating, loo breaks, impromptu situations you have to attend to (such as phone calls). Plus your energy will flag at certain times of the day (2-3pm is a low-energy patch for many people), so aim to be realistic about what can be done in the time you have left.

Look at your deadlines and decide which items must *definitely* be completed by the end of today. Check out:

- Can any tasks be broken down into smaller ones?
- Which tasks can you leave until another day?
- What would be the worst that could happen if you did?
- Can you put back any of the deadlines?
- Who would you need to consult if you had to do this?

continued over...

Then decide what you will set as your realistic target for today and write these on a separate sheet or highlight them.

Now you might have something like this:

TASK	TIME it will take	DEADLINE
1. Prepare presentation for conference	50 minutes	end of Thursday, (18 th)
2. Prepare the Powerpoint section only	15 minutes	end of today
3. Finish report	2 hours	lunchtime today
Ask Joan if I can finish this tomorrow	2 mins	straight away - first job
Start first section only	30 minutes	end of today
3. Get better quote for house insurance	40 minutes	next Friday (26 th) do next week?

How this system helps

1) When you write things down you can see exactly what needs to be done. Sometimes we panic when there are lots of chores we're trying to remember and trying to organise spinning around inside our heads. Once they are on paper, they can seem more manageable. You can also break big tasks down into smaller items to make them less daunting.

2) We often forget that some tasks take a lot less time than we imagine. A list of ten items can look insurmountable, when in reality they might only take five minutes each. In under an hour you could have cleared these ten tasks from your 'to-do' list.

3) When we get clearer about how long tasks are likely to take and when they need to be completed, we start to feel more in control. When we feel more in control, our confidence increases, because we feel we can cope with the situation.

Don't forget that sometimes 'self-help' of this kind isn't enough - and you may need the support of a professional Counsellor or Life-Coach.