



Streamlining your Schedule

Streamlining your schedule is all about balance. Creating balance and harmony in a hectic life can be tricky. Some days you feel like you can't get it all done and you're always in a mad dash to the next event. I understand this. We've had many chaotic days in our house. We've had the "running out of milk, short tempered, can't find my notebook" mornings. We've spent Saturday afternoons dashing from game to lesson to party.

But if you put a few systems in place, you should have less days feeling rushed and frazzled. And hopefully more days spent singing *Time is on my Side*. When your life is balanced, you feel more relaxed and have more patience for the unexpected.

Map out your schedule. If you can't seem to get it all done. Try this:

- List all of your primary responsibilities as a spouse, parent and employee. Write down everything: work, drive the carpool, volunteer in the classroom, grocery shop, pay the bills, do the laundry and so forth. It really helps to see it all on paper.
- Add secondary activities to the list such as time you would like to spend with friends, hobbies you would like to pursue or volunteer responsibilities in your church, school or community.
- Fill out a weekly schedule. I've prepared a simple [downloadable form](#). First fill out the time blocks that are non-negotiable primary activities.
- When possible consolidate tasks to leave a few larger blocks of available time. For instance, if you run all of your errands at one time you will save time in commuting. If you make five stops in one night instead of stopping every night, you will build extra blocks of free time into your schedule.

I used this technique when I started this website. The goal was to create blocks of time for work, without disrupting the status quo at home. By consolidating jobs and completing errand and grocery shopping once a week, I was able to weave the extra hours into my life.

- Plan to use your *stray minutes*. Everyone has small blocks of time in-between

appointments, while the kids are doing homework or while dinner is cooking. *Use these!* It only takes a few minutes to accomplish small tasks like emptying the dishwasher, folding laundry or balancing the checkbook.

- Next fit secondary activities in the remaining slots.
- Continue filling in the blanks until each activity has its own block of time.

The beauty of this system is that it establishes routines. In our family, I grocery shop on Monday, take the trash out on Tuesday, pay the bills on Wednesday and change the sheets on Saturday. There are no surprises. I know what's coming and I feel prepared.

What happens if you don't have enough time for everything you want to do?

1) Negotiate with your spouse. I was going to give up singing in the choir because my sons had basketball practice. But then my husband thought he would enjoy coaching. So it was added to his schedule and deleted from mine. (The basketball games were on Saturdays, so I was still able to cheer the boys on.)

2) Delegate some chores to your kids. Our family lives by this rule, "We all live here. We all help out." Kids can help out in a multitude of small ways. *And every task they complete is one less item on your list!*

3) Find creative ways to spend time with friends. Schedule a regular night to scrapbook, or go prepare meals together at a local meal assembly place. Another idea is to find a walking partner. Exercise and catch up at the same time!

4) Rethink an endless stream of activities for your kids. Avoid the trap of running from one activity to the other. It can be stressful and exhausting. Sometimes your kids just want to spend time with *you*.

When our kids didn't want to sign up for many activities this summer, I was flattered. (Actually, at first I was nervous about an endless summer stretching in front of us...) Then I realized there may not be that many more summers where they want to spend time with me. I decided to embrace it. We planned an exciting summer of biking, hiking and camping in State and National Parks. And we had a great time.

Here are three of my favorite time savers:

Beware of Time Traps. When I was first adjusting to motherhood, I picked up the book, *The Sidetracked Home Executive*, by Pam Young and Peggy Jones. They had a line that still makes me smile; IGAD (I've got all day!)

The two sisters who wrote the book talked about ambling through their days, getting sidetracked and not accomplishing things because they thought they had

all day to get things done. Scheduling helps eliminate that problem.

Once you begin to schedule your time, you will become more aware and less tolerant of distractions. Here are a few of the culprits: long telephone conversations, TV, surfing the internet, controlling email, sorting snail mail, endless daily errands, and searching for lost items.

Cut back on TV one or two nights a week. If the statistics are true, the average family watches four hours of TV per night. This would be a fast way to recapture four to eight hours per week!

Think twice before you say yes. On a couple of occasions, I have agreed to serve on a board or committee without realizing how big of a time commitment I was agreeing to. I'm not suggesting that you avoid volunteering. I *am* saying, *go into it with your eyes wide open.*

Think of your time as currency. Spend it wisely. There are many ways to spend your time. Some are useful and some are just frittering it away.

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