

## **PARISH NURSE'S NOTES FOR AUGUST 2022**

### **Do You Find It Hard To Focus on Single Tasking?**

Have you ever had your computer lock up when you have opened too many files or programs at once? No, this isn't a PC versus Apple posting. It is about Multi-Tasking versus Single-Tasking though.

Sometimes when we try to multi-task, we may actually freeze up, lock up or quit performing at our peak. Now, I am not talking about brushing your teeth in the shower to save time and I am not talking about listening to a book on tape while you are out running or at the gym. What I am talking about is the pressure to get so much done in a day that we try to split our focus and work on several things at once. In the end, by not single-tasking, the work completed is often less than spectacular or it may turn out disastrous.

### **Multi-Tasking Causes Stress**

The term multi-tasking originated in the computer industry and we sometimes see where this works wonderfully and other times where the crash leads to a loss of important material. Researchers have studied human multi-tasking for the past 25 years or so and have found that the brain cannot fully focus when multi-tasking. We take longer to complete tasks, often double or more the time, and are predisposed to error. Mayer and Moreno have studied the phenomenon of cognitive load and have concluded that it is difficult, and possibly impossible to learn new information while engaging in multi-tasking.

In fact, we are not working on things simultaneously, but rather toggling back and forth. This causes us to start and refocus over and over again, which wastes even more time and increases the risk of error.

### **Multi-Tasking And Technology**

In this age of technology, this inattention to detail due to multi-tasking is apparent when people talk on cell phones while driving. Talking and driving are mutually exclusive because focusing on both the conversation and the road uses the same part of the brain. A study published in the Human Factors journal showed that drivers talking on cell phones were involved in more rear-end collisions and sped up slower than drivers intoxicated over the .08% legal limit. When talking, people must withdraw their attention from the road in order to formulate responses. Because the brain cannot focus on two sources of input at one time, this distracts the brain and increases the likelihood of accidents.

Socially, we see this multi-tasking or toggling happen in our youth. They are conversing, texting and listening to music all at once. Though they seem fairly adept at doing this, they are not really picking up on all the data and social cues that they would if they were focused on just the conversation at hand.

## **Multi-Tasking And Losing The Ability To Focus**

We can become frustrated and feel overly taxed and worn out. Developing the ability to focus completely on a single task can help in our energy management. This doesn't mean that we have to concentrate from the beginning to the end of the task, but it may mean that as we work on parts of the task that we keep single-tasking and avoid distractions or the urge to work on another issue at the same time.

### **Beverly's Hot Tips for Celebrating Single Tasking Day:**

Single Tasking should be our main way of operating when needing to accomplish important tasks

- Let go of the idea that the more we tackle at any given time, the more productive we are or will be
- Often while working on a task, new ideas or tasks will pop into your focus. Have a to-do list open on your computer that these items can be quickly and easily jotted down for evaluation and implementation at a later time
- Set your priorities for the day or time frame that you have and don't let other distractions take you off course. Shut down your email notifiers so that curiosity doesn't take you off course. Shut the door to your office and put the phone on voicemail, especially if the task needs to utilize your creativity or problem solving abilities
- Build in breaks. Set an alarm that notifies you of when these breaks need to occur. Too long on any task and our focus and productivity start to wane. Use these breaks to stretch and get the blood flowing back to your brain which will increase your creativity and energy. Grab a glass of water, as water helps to restore waning energy
- We have become like junkies in many ways, by needing a 'fix'. We check our emails, notices and webpages out of curiosity. By setting time aside for
- these activities, we fill our curiosity, yet we are more likely to stay on task and complete that task more efficiently and effectively

### **Single Tasking Takes Effort**

One report that I read, stated that multi-tasking is doing two jobs at the same time, poorly. But it is a hard habit to break. Even while writing this post, my cell phone buzzed letting me know that someone had sent me some interesting tidbit of information. I automatically reached for it and then caught myself. Even in that split second, I lost my train of thought and had to go back and re-read what I had just written.... It's easier for our brains to manage single-tasking compared to multi-tasking.

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