

# Scheduling

*‘A schedule defends from chaos and whim.*

*It is a net for catching days.’*

– Annie Dillard

Investment	What's the payoff?			
	Time saved	Household harmony	Peace of mind	Money saved
 2-3 hours				

## Reality check

Scheduling embraces the idea that, if it's on the calendar, it gets done. We're not just talking about scheduling events – these are a given. We're talking about allocating time for important tasks and recurring activities to support your household and personal life. The reflex to schedule things for work comes pretty naturally. But do you have a regular timeslot for doing your shopping, yoga practice or reviewing household bills? Why doesn't everyone in your household know when book club, netball

training and soccer practice are? When you see the blank space of a Sunday in your diary, does it reflect the truth of what that day holds?

**For many of us, the timetable of our personal lives is in our heads, where it's subject to the whims of memory and motivation, and competes with the drama of the day.**

Notes about events and activities can pop up around your home like mushrooms. It's exasperating when there's no single source of truth, which captures all the things needing your time. Perhaps your partner is oblivious to the household's weekly rhythm and neither of you have a complete view.

Allocating time to the wider set of tasks that set a great foundation for our lives means less worry that we should be making better use of our time. You can relax, knowing you've built the important stuff into your day. Scheduling can also help you realise you're trying to pack too much in, that it's time to rethink the numerous commitments you've said 'yes' to. Does your calendar look like a well-played game of Tetris or emptier than a COVID exposure site?

In this chapter, we'll help you consolidate your personal and household diaries into a convenient digital calendar. Then we'll introduce you to the categories of activities that belong in your schedule, as well as show you how to carve out time for life admin and the actual fun stuff. Scheduling is the first pillar of your life admin system.

## Why

Your calendar reflects your life's obligations and priorities. Use it to schedule external events, household and to-do list tasks, family commitments, and personal activities to support not just the important

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stuff, but the fun stuff too. Your calendar forces you to make choices about how best to spend your time.

Scheduling:

- gives you peace of mind, knowing the important tasks will get done and there's time for leisure
- supports new habits by offering visibility, consistency and repetition
- helps you fight procrastination and promotes productivity
- enables you to be proactive about life admin
- provides transparency about whether you are over-committed.

To schedule effectively, you need a digital calendar you can access on the go. If you have a partner or family, it's a good idea to set up a shared digital calendar that everyone can see and add events to. If you already have individual digital calendars and an established process of adding each other to events, then this can achieve the same level of visibility and convenience as a shared calendar.

Setting up one digital calendar – rather than using paper wall calendars, whiteboard weekly schedules, work calendars, datebooks or diaries – gives you:

- a dedicated place to get things out of your head, freeing up your memory
- a one-stop shop to see all your commitments and activities
- an easy way to add recurring events such as sports practice or music lessons
- a single point of truth, rather than a variety of sources that need aligning
- a calendar separate from work, so you can truly switch off out of hours and take it with you when you change jobs

- constant access via your devices, so you can check and update your availability on the fly
- the ability to share it seamlessly with others in your household, so everyone knows what's going on.

As diehard wall calendar fans, we were nervous about losing the immediacy of that visual monthly view. But using the monthly view in the computer calendar app has quickly become a habit. The benefits of having more space to include everything, and the confidence that the digital calendar actually captures everything, far outweigh the adjustment.

For coparenting families, a shared family calendar provides a way to communicate about the children's personal, school and extra-curricular commitments. Importantly, your personal calendar can stay private.

## How: step by step

### *Set up a digital calendar*

If you share your life with others, you need a calendar you can all access and contribute to via your digital devices. If you already have a shared family or life admin email address, it makes sense to use this account for your shared calendar tool. If not, choose Google Calendar or Microsoft Exchange, because they integrate pretty seamlessly on different devices. (For more on setting up a dedicated 'life admin' email address, see Chapter 4.)

On your computer, open the email account and click into the associated calendar tool. In settings, update permissions by adding the email addresses of other household members you want to have access to the calendar (if they don't already have access to this email account). You can also update notification settings to trigger reminders etc.

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Head to YouTube if you get lost or stuck. There are videos for every calendar tool that step you through the setup process for various devices and how to set your preferences.

Open your computer's calendar app and add your new shared calendar account here. Now when you view your computer calendar, you'll see events from the shared calendar plus your personal calendar. Colour coding helps you recognise the difference. If having a big monthly calendar view is important to you, play around with the day, week and monthly layouts, so you can see the right amount of detail.

Once everyone who needs calendar access has it, then it's just a matter of ensuring you consult it regularly and add new events. When someone mentions an activity in passing, your response is now: 'Please add it to the calendar.' When someone asks about an activity's details, you can now say: 'It's in the calendar.' This is your new source of truth, and the truth will set you free.

### *Isn't there an app for that?*

There are dedicated apps that provide shared calendars and other features like to-do lists (see Chapter 5), which may suit your style. If you don't consider yourself digitally savvy, this may be an easier setup than managing multiple apps. At the time of writing, the most well-known ones are:

- 1. Cozi** This app has a family calendar, shared to-do lists, shopping lists, recipes and even a family journal. Anyone in the family can access the shared calendar, get reminders, and see lists from any computer (PC or Mac) or any mobile device (iPhone/iPad or Android phone/tablet). The Cozi list library has pre-made checklists and shopping lists, which you can add to your account automatically. The free version

includes the most useful features, but you'll be subjected to ads. It costs about \$50 a year to remove these.

- 2. Picniic** Similar to Cozi, the key features of the Picniic app include a calendar, meal planning, recipes, to-do lists, a news feed and photo-sharing capability. Unlike Cozi, you can't get all the features in the free version, so you'll need to upgrade to get things such as meal planning.
- 3. TimeTree** This is a popular family calendar app. TimeTree helps you plan a day, week and month for all family members at once. A key feature is that the app allows you to comment on events in the calendar. It allows lists to be shared, too.

### *Add the calendar to your phone*

You've created your new calendar and set it up on your computer. Now it's time to add it to your phone's calendar app. Depending on your devices, this might happen automatically. Head to your phone's calendar app and check. If it's not there, add it.

Not all calendar apps are created equal. When it comes to displaying multiple calendars from different services, your phone's native calendar app rates pretty poorly compared with those purpose-built for this situation. In particular, if you or your partner want to see both your work and shared calendars, as well as a personal calendar, then choose an app that syncs these calendars smoothly.

Websites such as TechRadar regularly review calendar apps, if you want to geek out on this. Highly rated apps include:

- **Google Calendar** This has direct integration into other Google services, which is great if you also use Gmail and Google Drive.
- **Outlook** Useful if you have an Outlook calendar, but this also works equally well with Google accounts.

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- **Any.do** This app is highly rated for its ease of use on a small phone screen and colour coding for various calendars and events.

Play around with what works for your situation. You need to consider how easy the app is to use on your phone, plus any additional features you want to use. Spend some time making sure you've explored all the features of your app.

Now when you view your preferred calendar app on your phone, it will show not only the events in your personal or work calendar, but also those in the shared calendar. This is the moment you've been waiting for: one diary to rule them all. You're ready to put this bad boy to work.

## Schedule your time

Scheduling may take away some blank space from your calendar, but that space probably wasn't when you had your feet up in a hammock, sipping a mojito. Did the blank space whisper spontaneity and freedom to you? Or was the usual busyness of daily life you've never bothered to write down just masquerading as free time?

If you schedule all those things that are essential to you, then you'll know any clear space in your calendar is truly empty for doing anything you want, guilt-free.

### **A little intention goes a long way.**

There are three types of activities to schedule:

- **The inevitable** These activities crop up each and every week, month or year.
- **Hour of Power** Set aside an hour each week to address substantial life admin tasks.

- **The inspirational** These activities support a positive habit or bring you joy.

### *The inevitable*

Start by scheduling activities that inevitably need to be done every week, or that reliably come up during the year. The idea is to be proactive and plan for them, rather than be reactive. Taking the initiative allows you to schedule activities at convenient days and times.

First, schedule recurring household tasks. Scheduling tasks that you know will result in mayhem if they don't get done can be a game-changer – ensuring you don't over-commit, and sharing the load across your family.

Consider scheduling things such as:

- meal planning
- grocery shopping
- meal preparation or bulk cooking
- laundry
- cleaning
- gardening
- dog walking
- daycare or school drop-off and pick-up.

For some of you, putting these tasks in a calendar may feel over the top. If these tasks hum along in your household, we agree. If not, ask yourself whether it's more absurd to run out of clean underwear every week, or to constantly remind your partner when it's their turn to do something, than to pop it in the diary? Be open to an experiment; try it, see what works better.

Don't use the default one-hour slot in your calendar, when 15 or 30 minutes might be enough. If these recurring tasks are things you'd rather handball temporarily or permanently, see Chapter 10: Outsourcing.

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For how many weeks do you ignore the car service alert on your dashboard, before trying to find a date when a courtesy vehicle is available? Many of these unavoidable activities can be organised in one go at the start of the year, allowing you to set and forget (or at least not have to worry about them).

Set dates for these activities at the start of the year:

- dentist visits
- school curriculum days and school holidays
- annual car servicing
- hairdresser appointments
- pet grooming and vet appointments
- health, beauty and medical appointments
- holidays
- practice, rehearsals, training sessions
- volunteering or committee meetings
- house maintenance, such as gutter cleaning, replacing smoke alarm batteries, pruning trees and shrubs, chimney cleaning, and carpet, rug and upholstery deep-cleaning.

List them, then jump online and start booking appointments and sending emails. Make sure you put enough detail in the calendar entry – what, when, where, how, who – so whoever is involved in that event or task has enough information to act on it without needing further instructions. This helps you share the load by allowing people to act independently.

### *Hour of Power*

Some life admin tasks don't need to be scheduled, but neither can they all be expected to happen of their own accord. We like wishing and hoping, but we love planning more.

**Ten Minute Time Killers** This category of tasks can be done in idle time. It might be buying a new charger cable online or filling in a lengthy registration form. You could do them on your phone waiting in line, or in between meetings, or while you're sort of watching TV. These tasks don't need to be scheduled but you do need to be confident there will be some guaranteed whitespace in your week where you can get to them.

**Two Minutes Too Easy** These fast, easy tasks can be done as soon as they appear on your radar. If you open an email and a bill needs to be paid, open up your banking app and pay it there and then. It'll be all over in two minutes and you can delete the message. Done. Next.

**Hour of Power** This is time committed to substantial to-do list items, where you need to concentrate, so unlike Ten Minute Time Killers or Two Minutes Too Easy tasks, these *do* need to be scheduled. It may be to change your electricity provider or plan a birthday party or review your superannuation. Schedule a recurring timeslot each week. Give it a powerful name, such as Set Me Up Sunday or Monday Magic Time, to claim this as the space when seriously useful shizzle gets done. Our brains are weird like that. Ameliorate this time with a music playlist that gets you in the zone, pour yourself water/wine/whisky – whatever it takes – and slip into your Oodie. It all helps.

If you have a partner, you may want to schedule this for a time when you'll both be at home, so you can tackle this stuff together. Or you may want to alternate this responsibility, so each week one of you gets the job of dealing with these more complex life admin tasks. We're sure they look cute in your Oodie, too.

Early on, use your Hour of Power to build the foundations of your new life admin system covered in the upcoming chapters – install a password manager, set up cloud storage, refine to-do lists and so on.

Time is truly your most valuable resource, so prioritising initial Hours of Power to set up this tech may seem bleak. So think back to the

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goals you're working towards and reframe these exercises as short-term pain for long-term gain. We'll show you how to make this process as efficient as possible. We promise this investment will give you and your family a generous return for many years to come.

Want to take it to the next level? You may wish to use one Hour of Power each month for a **Momentum Meeting**. This is time to review your schedule, prioritise your tasks in line with your goals and values, and keep your life admin humming.

Dave Allen, a productivity expert, recommends using a regular review process to 'get clear', 'get current' and 'get creative'. If you have a significant other or kids who can help out, add a fourth C: 'get collaborative'.

So what might this session look like? Initiate your Hour of Power mood-setters. Pull out your calendar, to-do lists and any lurking paperwork or emails, and tackle the Cs.

Purpose	Focus	Get collaborative
Get clear: Review and refine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Review your to-do lists, tick off completed activities and add anything new (for help with to-do lists, see Chapter 5).</li><li>Ensure all inevitable tasks are already included in your calendar.</li><li>Check your budget: if more work is required, set aside an Hour of Power to work on it.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Agree on all items on the to-do list, and their priorities and deadlines.</li><li>Check who is assigned to your to-do list tasks.</li></ul>

## Life Admin Hacks

Purpose	Focus	Get collaborative
<p>Get current: Schedule life admin for the month ahead</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate tasks to the next month's Hours of Power by reviewing your to-do list.</li> </ul> <p>Add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seasonal tasks (e.g. tax preparation, health insurance rate rise, Christmas plans)</li> <li>• Expiring plans or policies</li> <li>• Comparison shopping for major expenses or upcoming purchases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide whether each task is a solo or joint effort.</li> <li>• Allocate responsibilities for each Hour of Power.</li> </ul>
<p>Get creative: Plan the fun</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look ahead and schedule inspirational activities.</li> <li>• Identify upcoming birthdays and occasions needing gifts.</li> <li>• Plan your social life.</li> <li>• Plan/book holidays.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide who is buying gifts.</li> <li>• Allocate responsibilities for social plans and holiday planning/booking.</li> </ul>

You can find a list of suggested monthly life admin tasks in Appendix 1.

### *The inspirational*

Now that you've made time for the 'musts' and 'shoulds', consider your 'wants'. Where do you want to direct more of your energy and attention?

**How you use your time reflects your values.  
What do you hold important in your life?**

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Want to spend more time in nature? More romantic couple time? More time for learning how to kickbox or knit or play poker or whatever else you're excited or curious about?

### **Scheduling can help you achieve the life you wish you were living.**

Make time for activities that support your wellbeing and happiness, that reinforce good habit changes and new behaviours, and that matter to you most. These may be things you want to do every day or week. They could be things that happen occasionally, which you can schedule in advance and look forward to. You may use scheduling to restrict less-nourishing activities that dominate your time, such as watching TV or checking emails or social media. Awareness is the precursor of choice.

#### *What do you want more of in life?*

- Date nights
- Mountain biking, hiking, swimming, running, dancing
- Reading
- Playing with your kids
- Walking the dog
- Meditation
- Eating out, baking or cooking up a feast
- Visiting family and friends
- Crafting, making, getting creative
- Gardening
- Listening to music
- Learning
- Sleeping

Balance your schedule with obligations and joys, duty and play. Both deserve time in your calendar, because how we spend our days is how we spend our lives.

\* \* \*

Schedules give you a framework to live your life in accordance with your goals and values. They also help you realise if you're trying to pack too much in. Schedules don't need to be set in stone. You can be as flexible as you want and ignore, reschedule or cancel as required. But these fundamental and aspirational activities in your calendar form your baseline. This foundation not only reflects how you intend to spend your time, but also gives you more control over it.

#### How Mia does it

I used to have a wall calendar with different columns for each household member and my phone default calendar, plus random things somehow ended up on my Google Calendar if they'd come via an email invitation. This led to occasional double-booking and a lopsided understanding and facilitation of our lives.

Now I have a shared Google Calendar with my kids' dad, where we capture family commitments. It's also where we capture our week on/week off custody arrangement with which parent is on duty. This is linked to our life admin Gmail account and Google Drive cloud storage. I use another Google Calendar for my personal events. These are both set up on my phone and laptop.

I don't integrate my work, personal and family calendars, as non-work commitments very rarely impact my work day.

I have a Set Me Up Sunday Hour of Power scheduled as a recurring fortnightly event. I use that time in the morning to prep for the weeks ahead and clear my life admin tasks. I tend to do my Ten Minute Time Killer tasks when my kids are having screen time on the weekends.

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It helps me limit and role-model healthy screen use, so I'm not on a device all the time. We're either all on screens together or all off together.

Meal planning, gardening and grocery shopping are in my calendar, and I book massage and chiropractic appointments for the whole year, along with dentist and hairdresser visits. This avoids having to interrupt the kids' school day.

In terms of fun stuff, in various seasons of my life, I'd email friends to lock in a monthly movie night and hikes every two months. I also pin down dates for girls' weekends away. It's the hardest thing in the world to extricate women from their families for two days, but if we can plan several months in advance, it has a chance of happening. It's buoying to have all these moments to look forward to during the year.

### How Dinah does it

I used to have three calendars: my work calendar, a weekly kids' schedule on the fridge, and a wall calendar with our social life and volunteering commitments. Party invitations, school notices and tickets to concerts were stuck on the noticeboard and fridge. It was chaos!

I set up our shared digital calendar with our life admin Gmail address. I used the Google Calendar web app on my computer to get started and transferred everything into the calendar. It took a couple of hours to set it all up. It was much quicker to do the initial setup on a computer than using a phone.

When adding activities that cross over with business hours, such as basketball practice, I also invite my work calendar to the event, to make sure I know to leave work early. I also invite my husband's work calendar to things like my exercise classes, so he knows to leave work on time to be home for the kids. I also added in the recurring responsibilities of school drop-offs and pick-ups.

Once the calendar was populated, I added it to my phone. I use the Outlook app on my phone rather than Google Calendar because it syncs

better with my work calendar. My husband and daughter also added it to their phones and we discussed what things they should add.

It made sense in my household to have a monthly Hour of Power called 'Admin Blitz' to tackle things such as private health insurance and tax returns. This is scheduled for a Sunday morning and I treat the family to breakfast out after I am done, as a reward for completing another irksome task. My husband usually mows the lawn at that time. Playing to our strengths! I've also scheduled an hour every Sunday night at 8.30 pm for our Momentum Meeting to set up the next week. I sit with my husband, share a glass of red or cup of tea, and review what's upcoming, tidy up our to-do lists, plan other important tasks and knock off any lingering Ten Minute Time Killers. This arrangement aligns best with my family's needs.

I generally address Ten Minute Time Killer tasks while waiting to collect someone from somewhere or during lunchtime at work. My husband does his fair share on his train commute.

We've recently added laundry to our schedule so we each have the responsibility on set days to tackle a few loads. It is surprising how much this small thing has contributed to improved household harmony.

In terms of sharing the mental load with my partner and kids, our shared calendar has been *the* most effective life admin tool. I used to hold all the complicated logistics in my head and now everything is in the calendar. My stress levels are all the better for it.

### SOS list

1. Set up a digital calendar.
2. Add the calendar to your phone.
3. Schedule the inevitable.
4. Schedule Hours of Power.
5. Schedule the inspirational.

