

Operation: *no regrets*

Your mission? Avoid common bridal blunders with our foolproof guide to big-day bliss ...

We're not going to tell you to stop worrying about your wedding, because you won't. We're not even going to tell you everything will go precisely to plan – it might not. What we can tell you is how to avoid the big mistakes brides make when planning their wedding, so you can be one step closer to having the gorgeous day you've always wanted. Here are the top offenders and how to dodge them ...

MISTAKE #1

Not setting a budget

So you're engaged! You finally get to plan the day of your dreams and you're having it all: the harpist, the chocolate fountain, the horse and carriage ... hold it right there! What about your budget? It's wise to sit down with your fiancé and talk money before anything else.

"Treat it like a project and work out what's important; you have to prioritise," says Cathrin D'Entremont, a Perth-based wedding planner, stylist and owner of CD Weddings (cdweddings.com.au). So, if you're a foodie, the caterer will be number one on your list, if you're a fashionista, it's the dress, and if you love dancing, perhaps it's all about the band. Break down your budget into sections and allocate money accordingly. But be flexible – if you go outside your budget in one area, you'll just need to curb spending somewhere else.

MISTAKE #2

Doing it all yourself

"Many brides find it hard to let go of any part of planning their wedding," says D'Entremont. But it's important to delegate, otherwise you'll be pulling your hair out in the lead-up to the big day. "Have a family get-together and discuss the wedding. Everyone has a talent they can put to use, even if it's something small, so give each person a job to take

responsibility for," suggests D'Entremont. As for the big jobs that only you can do, do your research – choose your reliable suppliers then let them guide you. "Pick your team and trust them to do the right thing. Then the only job you have is to enjoy the day," she adds.

MISTAKE #3

Losing too many kilos

... too close to the final fitting. We all want to look great on our day, but it's not all about being slim. You won't look your best if you're pale and unhealthy thanks to some crazy crash diet you've been following. Plus, you don't want your dress hanging from you like a sack.

If you do want to lose a little weight for your big day, or tone up a particular body part that will be on show, be realistic, set yourself a sensible goal and give yourself plenty of time.

"A healthy rate of weight loss is up to one kilogram a week, so plan ahead and start early so it's healthy and sustainable," says Weight Watchers spokesperson Bronwyn Stubbs.

MISTAKE #4

An "out-there" dress

When shopping for your wedding gown, the key is to choose something that suits your personal style and figure, that you'll feel comfortable and confident in for the entire day. Now's not the time to be too experimental.

"It's important to delegate otherwise you will end up pulling your hair out"

Whatever style you're thinking of, you'll want to be able to look back at your wedding photos in five, 10, even 20 years from now and feel happy with how you looked. "Keep in mind the venue of the wedding, whether it's an outdoor or indoor setting, and obviously the time of year. You'll be spending a minimum of eight hours in your lovely dress so make sure you're able to sit down in it, as well as get up and dance," says Sydney-based bridal designer Karen Willis Holmes (karenwillisholmes.com.au).

MISTAKE #5

Doing jobs on the day

According to D'Entremont, the success of your big day is all in the planning. "Aim to have everything organised three months before the wedding," she says. "So many of the beautiful little details that make a wedding special get left out in the end just because we run out of time." Of course, there will be one or two unavoidable errands you'll need to run on the day, like picking up flowers or laying out place cards, but keep these to a minimum. "Delegate someone you trust to do each of these jobs," says D'Entremont, "but not one of the bridal party, as you'll want your mum and your bridesmaids with you."

MISTAKE #6

Unplanned photo time

While it's definitely worthwhile setting aside some time for post-ceremony shots with your groom and bridal party, you don't want to eat into too much of your celebrations. According to photographer John Warren (warrenphotography.com.au), it pays to have a good chat with your photographer before the day to nut out a rough timeline so things can stick to schedule. He also recommends a test run with them beforehand. "Visit the venue and choose the spots where the photos will be taken. Make a list of the pictures you want and where they fit into the timeline," he says.

MISTAKE #7

Unwanted gifts

Let's face it, most of your guests will want to give you a token gift, but without a gift list or registry you run the risk of unwrapping 12 sets of wine glasses and eight vases. Not to mention a table full of presents that you then need to cart home after the reception.

"Gifts can go missing at the reception and it's much harder to keep track of who gives you what," says Aasa Neeme from The Sydney Wedding Registry (sydneyweddingregistry.com.au). To avoid this happening, "Choose a registry early on and send out cards with the invites. Make sure you put a wide variety of gifts on the list, because people still like to feel they're giving you what they choose," she adds.

Not the traditional type? You can ask guests to contribute funds towards an artwork you love, a substantial piece of furniture or your honeymoon, or choose a charity that guests can donate to on your behalf. While it can be a touch awkward asking guests for a gift when their presence really is present enough, you'll find that most people prefer some guidance so they can get you something you really want.

MISTAKE #8

An experimental 'do

If you're planning a complicated hairstyle, you'll need to have a hair trial well before the day. "You need to know if the style you want suits your face shape and if it will work with your hair," says Lizzie Liros of L'Bridal Hair by Lizzie in Sydney (lbridalhair.com.au). "To get the style right you may need to grow your hair or use specific products, which all takes time." And whatever you do, leave your hair alone in the run up to your big day. "Don't even change your shampoo or try a new type of hair mask," says Liros. It's best just to play it safe at this stage, even if secretly, you'd rather be blonde.

MISTAKE #9

Not enjoying the day

This is it, your wedding is here at last. You've been planning it for months and then ... it's over. Don't make the mistake of rushing around like a nutter on the day, trying desperately to spend time with each of your guests to the point where you don't get any time with your groom. It's your wedding day and you'll (probably) only have one, so make sure you take time out to soak up the precious moments.

"Build little things into the schedule," says D'Entremont. "Make sure you and your groom have your own car to get to the reception and when you arrive, take a few moments to have a drink together. Then some time later in the evening, sneak off for a romantic stroll."



"So the limo broke down ... who cares? This is way cooler!"

WHAT'S YOUR NO-REGRETS ADVICE?

"Whatever happens on the day, roll with it. My gown was trashed after climbing fences, walking through muddy grass and people stepping on it all the time, but at the end of it all, those marks, holes and rips on your dress become memories of the day itself." **Rachael, 23, married August 26, 2011**

"You can't control the weather, so why stress about something that is completely out of your hands? My suggestion: take some clear umbrellas just in case. Not only will you be dry if the heavens open, they look fantastic in photographs." **Kimberly, 27, married March 4, 2011**

"It may be your day, but your reception really is a 'party' that you are the host of. To be a good host, consider what your guests will want in terms of food, drinks and entertainment. If your guests are having a great time, you will have a great time!" **Toni, 26, married June 25, 2011**

"Don't worry about following tradition if it doesn't suit you, your budget or your day's order. We broke with tradition and had all our photos before the ceremony. As a result, we all looked fresh and flawless and our guests didn't have to wait around after the ceremony." **Natalie, 25, married April 23, 2011** **COSMO**