



Starting the Day the Right Way

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

What does your morning look like? Do you hit the snooze button on your alarm *several times* before finally dragging yourself out of bed? Do you rush around, trying not to be late? Are you guzzling coffee, trying to stay awake? Or do you feel stressed out and anxious before your day even *begins*?

Mornings are difficult and can be hectic as we try to get the kids ready for school, review a work presentation, answer the litany of emails that keep pinging our phones, and deal with any number of other disturbances. But there's a better way. Even if you have a busy day ahead of you and are pressed for time, making just a few small changes to your morning routine will get your day off to a better start.

According to Northwestern Medicine,

people are creatures of habit, and routines offer a way to promote health and wellness through structure and organization. Having a routine can greatly improve your health.

So, let's get into some practical, easy-to-implement ways to build a better morning routine so you can start your day the right way.

First, we have maybe the most difficult challenge of all time. Get out of bed the *first* time the alarm goes off. According to Physicians Immediate Care, U.S.-based urgent care and occupational health services organization,

hitting the snooze button has actually been shown to be more harmful than helpful because those extra few minutes of sleep do not provide you with quality, restorative sleep. This can make you groggier in the morning and interfere with your body's urge to wake up at the same time every day.

While it's best to be woken up naturally, either by your body's natural circadian rhythm or the light peeking in through your open curtains, that might not be realistic for those of us who have to be up before the sunrise or earlier than our bodies actually want to get up. But if you wake up and get up with your first alarm, you can at least be off to a better start than if you lounge in bed for a prolonged period of time.

Once you're up, check in with yourself. Notice your thoughts and how you're feeling. Isabelle Pikörn, the Chief Editor at Insight Timer, an app that offers free meditations for sleep, anxiety, and stress, lets us know that

very often, the first thoughts that enter your mind when you wake up reveal your current preoccupations. If you are worried about your child's test results, your spouse's irritable behavior, or a stressful project at work, these thoughts will probably rise to the surface first thing in the morning. They represent your mental pulse, in a way. It's a good idea to take that mental pulse.

By checking in with yourself, you become more aware of what could potentially derail your morning or your day. And once you become aware of those things, you can actively take steps to refocus your attention or to rid yourself of negative thoughts and feelings altogether.

Next, drink water first thing. In fact, you might even want to leave a glass of water by your bed overnight, so you can simply wake up and go to town on it. It is one of the fastest ways to dispense with early morning grogginess. Water carries nutrients to our cells, hydrates our skin, aids in digestion, and helps us eliminate toxins. The National Academy of Sports Medicine recommends drinking between 2.2 and 3 liters of water each day. So if you don't drink any water in the morning, you're already behind the eight ball.

If drinking water doesn't wake you up quite enough, take a shower right after you get up in the morning. A hot shower can comfort you and help ease you into your day. If you can handle it, end your shower with a blast of cold water to really get you going. Wim Hof - a Dutch motivational speaker and extreme athlete who can withstand freezing temperatures and has set world records for cold endurance - attributes his ability, in part, to taking cold showers. Cold exposure is a reset for your vascular system and can energize you while also making you feel more relaxed.

Eating breakfast in the morning is also important. We've all heard that 'breakfast is the most important meal of the day.' While in reality, *all* meals are important, eating something in the morning jumpstarts your fasted metabolism after having not eaten overnight. Eating breakfast

can improve your memory, your ability to focus and concentrate, and sharpen your problem-solving abilities, alertness, and mood. It also leads to better digestion and can help in managing your weight. Ideally, you want to eat some protein and whole grains or healthy fat to satiate you so you don't get hungry again mid-morning.

To help ready your body for the day, get moving! Stretching or doing some gentle exercises or gentle yoga in the morning can alleviate that stiff feeling we sometimes have after we wake up, and it leaves us less prone to injury as we engage in activity throughout the day. Exercise has been shown to have physiological effects on the brain as well. In his book *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, Dr. John R. Ratey discusses how exercise can “supercharge your mental circuits to beat stress, sharpen your thinking, lift your mood, boost your memory, and much more.”

While physical activity is great, if it's just not your thing, make time to meditate, sit quietly, repeat a mantra, or focus on your breathing instead. These are all great ways to slow your heart rate, calm a racing mind, and get you out of that 'fight or flight response' we experience when we're stressed. According to Isabelle Pikörn, “there is no scientific doubt anymore that mindfulness meditation is a powerful anxiety buster. Numerous studies have found that meditation reduces anxiety and increases positive feelings.” And, “taking the time to breathe deeply and deliberately every morning prepares your body and mind for the challenges the world might throw at you.”

Another great activity for the morning is journaling. Remember the bit about checking in with yourself in the morning? Writing in a journal is a great way to do that! But it doesn't have to be a paper journal. Use your phone to start an audio journal that you can record while you're driving to work or walking to the bus station. And this is a great time to practice some gratitude! Making a list of five things you're grateful for each morning will help shift your perspective from the things that might be weighing on your mind to the things that bring you joy.

By taking the time to consciously plan our mornings, we can create a routine that focuses on healthful living and also combats stress, fatigue, and anxiety. Don't worry if this seems like a daunting task at first. Try implementing some of these actions from tomorrow. But just take it one day at a time, and try to keep it going. Once you build the habit, it will get easier to stick with it. New habits typically take about 30 days to form, so give yourself at least that long. Author and leadership expert, John C. Maxwell believes that “you'll never change your life until you change something you do daily. The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.”

That's all for now. Thanks for listening.

Reading List

[Article] [Health Benefits of Having a Routine](#), Northwestern Medicine

[Article] [8 Healthy Ways to Start Your Day](#), Physicians Immediate Care

[Article] [6 Steps To Your Healthy Morning Routine](#), Isabelle Pikörn

[Bulletin] [Wake Up to the benefits of breakfast!](#), Johns Hopkins Medicine

[Article] [Mapping The Inner Journey](#), DailyOM

[Book] [Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain](#), John J. Ratey, MD

[Book] [The Wim Hoff Method: Activate Your Full Human Potential](#), Wim Hof