

11 Morning Routines to Save Your Day

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The morning routines of nearly every person have been turned upside down over the past year. As a consequence of lockdowns, self-isolation, working from home, and other family responsibilities, creating productive morning routines can seem like a difficult task. And, now that things are somewhat returning to normal, routines are shifting yet again.

However, instead of dismissing these changes as an inconvenience, implement a morning routine that will save your day. As Hal Elrod, author of “The Miracle Morning”, writes, “Focused, productive successful mornings generate focused, productive, successful days – which inevitably create a successful life.”

With that in mind, here are 11-morning routines you should try out today.

1. Wake up 15-minutes and be selfish.

Mornings, according to Chief Hop in *Stranger Things*, “are for coffee and contemplation.” And, I couldn’t agree more.

Personally, I've never been the type of person to roll out of bed and jump into the day. I need to wake up and just be for a couple of minutes. Coffee or tea is another requirement. And, as I've gotten older, this quiet time allows me to catch up on the news, respond to emails, or review my plans for the day.

At the same time, I also understand that this isn't possible for everyone. If you have a newborn, having any amount of free time is wishful thinking. But, if you constantly feel like your mornings are a chaotic rush, you might want to get up earlier.

That doesn't mean forcing yourself to get up at 5 a.m. — especially if you're not a morning person. But, you could just set your alarm 15-minutes earlier. It might not seem like much, but you can spend that time however you want, like engaging in a daily self-care routine.

2. Engage in creativity.

“Creativity in and of itself is important for remaining healthy, remaining connected to yourself and connected to the world,” Christianne Strang, a professor of neuroscience at the University of Alabama Birmingham and the former president of the American Art Therapy Association, told NPR.

“Anything that engages your creative mind — the ability to make connections between unrelated things and imagine new ways to communicate — is good for you,” adds Girija Kaimal, a professor at Drexel University and a researcher in art therapy. Specifically, being creative helps you imagine a more hopeful future and activates the brain's reward center. And, it can lower stress and strengthen your focus.

Know that you have 15 extra minutes in the morning, you can color, sketch, write, or knit part of a scarf.

3. Exercise...for under 10-minutes.

“The benefits of breathing and meditation are undeniable; just a couple minutes of relaxation can make your mind sharper, your senses more alert, and your entire body more peaceful,” notes Lily Herman over on The Muse.

“But in practice? Taking time to step away and meditate can seem daunting, not to mention confusing and difficult in the beginning,” says Herman. “I've personally tried getting in the zone to meditate on many occasions and have never really been able to find pure relaxation.”

The answer? Trying out the following two super-quick exercises;

- To increase your energy, set a timer and close your eyes for two minutes. Next, breathe in through your nose and four counts and out for three. This will stimulate your sympathetic nervous system making you feel more active and animated.
- To feel calmer, do the opposite. Inhale for three counts and exhale for four. This will trigger the parasympathetic nervous system making it easier for you to relax.

If you want to get your body moving, and you have the time, consider going for a morning run — or at least a brisk walk. You could also try a 10-minute yoga workout. Physical activity increases blood flow, stimulates the brain, and enhances your mental performance.

4. Establish a tech-free zone.

For the most part, I've done a solid job of following my circadian rhythms. Because of this, I tend to follow the same wake-sleep pattern. And, that means I'm not reliant on an alarm — my dog also shares this routine and gets me up at the same time every morning.

But, not everyone is as fortunate. So, it wouldn't hurt to have an extra layer of security. In this case, an alarm clock.

Instead of using your phone though, go out and purchase an actual alarm clock. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. After all, it serves one purpose, to wake you up at a specific time.

The reason? It's a simple way to prevent you from laying in bed and scrolling through emails, social media, or the news. In addition to being a waste of time and distraction, it's not good for your health and well-being. Case in point, in the midst of this seemingly neverending pandemic, doomscrolling has become an unhealthy habit.

5. Take care of the little things and then eat your frog.

If you've ever searched for productivity hacks, I'm sure you've come across the saying "eat the frog." You're not eating an amphibian for breakfast. Rather, it's a metaphor for your tackling your most important or challenging tasks for the day first.

In theory, this makes sense. We tend to have the most energy and focus not too long after waking. What's more, this presents distractions and procrastination from holding us back. And, we can all take a sigh of relief once these responsibilities are done and over with it.

But, there's something to be said about addressing the little things first. While you may not consider these a priority, they can interfere with your focus by creating mental clutter. For example, if you have to make an appointment with your vet or answer a question in an email, these will keep nagging at you until they're crossed off.

So, why not get these out of the way bright and early? As an added bonus, this will also help you build momentum to actually eat that frog.

6. Quell negative thoughts and refocus.

Dr. Greg Hammer, a physician and professor at Stanford University Medical Center and author of *Gain Without Pain: The Happiness Handbook for Health Care*, recommends taking a four-step intentional approach to start your day.

- Gratitude. Regardless if this is in a journal or a mental note, acknowledge three things that you're grateful for.
- Acceptance. Observe, feel, and accept whatever you can not change.
- Intention. Make the decision to direct your energy towards the things that "are healthy, whole, kind, praiseworthy."
- Non-judgement. If you catch yourself categorizing something as good or bad, stop yourself and embrace "benevolent indifference"

7. Listen to your morning playlist.

"Regardless of whether you end up at a downtown office or sitting behind your in-home office desk, the morning is where you find the energy you need to power through the day," writes Jordan Taylor Sloan for Mic.

"Scientists have found that songs with heavy bass (hard rock and hip-hop) inspire feelings of power, and produce a surge of confidence and more complex conceptual thought — a perfect start to any day," he adds.

8. Activate all of your senses.

You've probably never realized this before. But, as soon as you rise and shine, all five of your senses are being put to work. It could be the sound of the alarm clock or birds chirping. If you have a coffee maker with a timer, you might smell that brewing. And, you can feel and see the sun on your skin.

Instead of tuning out, pay attention to these five senses. And, infuse them into your morning routine. Examples could be noticing how your feet feel on the floor when you first get out of bed or what colors you see. Savor the taste and smell of your breakfast. And, consider how your morning playlist makes you feel.

Tapping into your senses will help you make better decisions. And, more importantly, it can help you slow down, be more present, and appreciate what you have at the moment.

9. Take a shower.

“Humans tend to perspire at night,” says **Dr. Gary Goldenberg**, a dermatologist in New York and a professor at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “When you wake up in the morning, there’s all this sweat and bacteria from the sheets that’s just kind of sitting there on your skin.” So, taking a shower in the morning will “wash all of that gunk and sweat off that you’ve been sleeping in all night.”

While we tend to balk at taking a cold shower, you might want to give it try. Exposing yourself to cold water can increase blood flow and neurotransmitters.

10. Soak up the sun.

In the morning, sunlight promotes wakefulness in the body. The reason? It suppresses the production of melatonin, which gives you more energy. Open the blinds as soon as you wake up and/or flip on the lights to give your body energy. And, make sure you get plenty of sunlight throughout the day, whether you're walking your dog or sipping your cup of coffee on the patio — just don't forget the sunscreen.

What if you wake up before the sun has risen? Purchase an alarm clock that can mimic a sunrise. Examples include the Philips Wake-Up Light Alarm Clock or the HomeLabs Sunrise Alarm Clock.

11. Don't overload your morning routine.

It may seem counterproductive to say this after giving you so much advice. However, your own morning routine should be one that is most effective for you. Also, make sure to keep it short and simple so that it's not overwhelming. After all, it's not sustainable to have a morning checklist or routine that makes you stressed before you even wake up.