11 Tips for a Morning Routine That Supports Mental Health

Consistently performing healthy behaviours might be the key not only to a calmer morning, but to improved mental health throughout your day.

It has been shown that routines filled with healthy habits is a great way to move more easily through your day while expending less mental energy. A 2015 study on the psychology of habits demonstrated that people may rely more heavily on habits when stressed, suggesting that forming healthy routines could help maintain physical, emotional, and mental health during stressful times.

11 BUILDING BLOCKS OF A MORNING ROUTINE FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Morning routines can vary depending on individual needs and of course, time. What works for one person may be burdensome for another. Explore the building blocks of mental health friendly morning routines below and start thinking about what elements you could incorporate into your morning to enhance your well-being throughout the day.

1. Prepare

You've likely heard it before, but a successful morning routine is only as strong as the bedtime routine that came before it. Which aspects of your bedtime routine should you use to ensure the success of your morning routine?
Set an alarm
Try preparing what you'll need, such as coffee, meals, or an outfit, the night before.
Overnight oats. Make sure you have milk, teabags, coffee.
Making sure your keys, bag, and other essentials are near the door, especially if you need to leave home first thing in the morning, can also help reduce stress and chaos.

2. Let light in

Exposure to bright light first thing in the morning increases feelings of wakefulness. To clear away morning grogginess, try turning on a lamp or your bedroom lights, or take in some sunlight within the first 5 to 10 minutes of waking up in the morning.

Those who live in higher latitudes (father away from the equator) will experience more seasonal darkness. Individuals who live farther away from the equator have been shown to experience higher rates of seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and sleep issues have been identified as a key factor in SAD. A morning routine may help individuals who experience more hours of darkness continue to feel awake each morning, even if the sun has not yet risen.

For those who routinely wake up before the sun has risen, blue light has been proven to help people feel awake in the morning. Using the right kind of light first thing in the morning could help decrease morning drowsiness and increase alertness more quickly.

3. Make your bed

It takes minutes to make a bed, but bed making is still a task which many people neglect. If aren't currently in the habit of tidying up your bed each morning, you might want to reconsider Some experts argue that making one's bed first thing in the morning is an effective way to boost your self-esteem. By completing a task first thing, you've boosted your own confidence in your ability to set things in order and may be more likely to continue that trend throughout the day.

4. Hydrate

According to a study published in *Nutrition Reviews*, dehydration can negatively impact cognitive function. As most of us wake up a little dehydrated after a night's sleep, rehydrating first thing in the morning can help improve cognition. Dehydration has also been linked to fatigue as well as symptoms of low mood, including irritability and confusion. While adequate hydration alone probably won't cure mental health issues such as depression or anxiety, chronic dehydration also isn't likely to make those conditions any easier to handle. Drinking water is a good way to hand yourself the energy to deal with the symptoms that come with many mental health issues.

5. Nourish

When asked what might be one of the best things someone could do for their mental health first thing in the morning, Psychologists recommend getting something to eat. "Eating something within an hour or so of rising brings your blood sugar level up and prevents crankiness. You've been fasting all night. Eating something, especially something with complex carbs, fat and protein, will not only improve your mood, but will give you an energy

boost to carry you through your morning activities," she explains. "Never underestimate the power of a balanced blood sugar level throughout the day to help manage your mood." Research also continues to tell us that while breakfast is an important meal, what's more important may be what it's made of. Boost the benefits of eating breakfast by incorporating some protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates. Nuts, yogurt, and eggs have been shown to support mental health in those who experience anxiety, for example.

6. Write down what you're grateful for

Research shows that gratitude can increase an individual's happiness, improve relationships, and enhance one's sense of well-being. A study described in the University of California Berkeley's *Greater Good Magazine* demonstrated that even dedicating a short amount of time to gratitude each day can help improve symptoms for those who experience mental health issues.
To start your day off with a grateful mindset, try writing down three things you're grateful for, and keep them present in your mind as you start your day. Even when you keep your list private, studies suggest you're very likely to benefit from the practice of fostering gratitude.

7. Motivate

Motivation plays a science-backed role in reducing sleepiness and promoting wakefulness. When motivation is hard to come by, getting out of bed can be difficult. If you routinely struggle with the will to get out of bed first thing in the morning (and you're already getting adequate sleep), consider adding something to your routine that adds a spark of joy and motivation—something that helps pull you out of bed and boost your mood. This could be anything from an activity you enjoy, such as walking a dog, to a new type of coffee you're excited to try.

8. Avoid technology

While technology can be used strategically to enhance a person's mood and mental health, smartphone use in particular can easily become a compulsive behavior that erodes rather than fortifies mental well-being. Research has found that problematic smartphone use is linked to increased anxiety and depression.
Consider avoiding or cutting down on the time you spend looking at a smartphone screen first thing in the morning. Doing so may help increase your mental clarity and sense of

purpose for the day while shielding you from information about news stories, politics, or social media drama, which can often contribute to a low mood.

9. Meditate

Morning [meditation](#) can help you center yourself for the rest of the day and has many proven mental health benefits. Even 15 minutes of daily meditation can produce the same stress-relieving effects in the body as taking a vacation. Meditation has also been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and even [pain](#).
If you have time, try a 5 to 15-minute meditation as one of your first morning activities. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Set a timer for the time you have to meditate that day. Then meditate. One popular way to meditate is to close your eyes and focus on the present and on your [breaths](#). Many people also use guided meditations to get started.

10. Make a list

Writing a to-do list at the beginning of your day can help you plan what you need to get done and more effectively organize and execute the tasks on your list. Often, we have so much to do that we can't hold it in our minds all at once, and the idea of forgetting an obligation can be anxiety-inducing. Take a couple minutes to jot down your goals for the day, and you won't need to worry about forgetting to do anything on the list!

List-writing works by reducing chaos and lending structure to your day, as well as support for your [memory](#). To write an effective list, start with your top objectives for the day. Keep it small, realistic, and focused–monitor negative self-talk and watch out for tasks that aren't necessary or contribute to distraction. Organize yourself around your values and goals and seek to channel your best "you."

11. Physical activity

For those with busy schedules, getting moving first thing in the morning is one good way to make sure they get exercise that day. As exercise is proven to have a positive effect on mood and can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, it's something to consider prioritizing. While your physical activity can include a morning run, it doesn't have to. If you're short on time, even stretching and some jumping-jacks can give you a chance to get your blood flowing.

Exercise releases [endorphins](#), which can help reduce stress and anxiety; in the morning, this can contribute to a sense of calm that helps guide the first part of your day.

Whether you have 5 spare minutes or multiple hours each morning, a routine can help individuals set themselves up for better mental health throughout the day. Choose morning activities that allow you to work with rather than against yourself.