August 15, 2016

16 Productive Habits You Can Practice in Less Than 30 Minutes

Here are a few easy ways you can tweak your weekly routine to be healthier and happier.

By Alyse Kalish

Improving your life doesn't have to be about making one big gesture. Instead, it's something you can constantly work on--and it typically comes down to the small things you do every day.

I understand that no one has all the time in the world to think about self-improvement when there's work and family and bills to pay, so let's start with just 30 minutes a week.

Yup, that's all--now I bet you're listening.

What I'm asking is that you try one (or two, or five, or all) of these activities and see if they help you become a better "you," whether that means increasing your confidence, reducing your stress, creating deeper relationships, or becoming a healthier individual.

1. Achieve Mindfulness

I'm sure you're so sick of hearing that you should "totally try meditation," especially from your (recently) yoga-crazed mother. But mindfulness is a lot more realistic to achieve than the kind of meditation you hear about because it doesn't require years of practice and a yoga mat. And, it only takes 30 minutes (or less!) sitting right at your desk.

2. Develop a Consistent Morning Routine

Muse Career Coach Adrian J. Hopkins suggests that the key to having a productive day, and saving yourself time in the morning, is "breaking down every task into small steps, then scheduling everything by starting from the end of the day and working backward." This means you know exactly what activity you'll do when from the moment you wake up.

Sounds a bit overwhelming, yes, but the reason it works is because you don't waste any time trying to decide on things--spending 10 minutes picking out an outfit, spending 15 minutes deciding if you want to go on a run. This way, you limit yourself to small minute increments so that you'll always be out the house exactly on time.

3. Develop a Consistent Bedtime Routine

A happy, healthy morning starts with a killer bedtime routine. There's no perfect answer for making your own, but the important thing is to make one and stick to it.

For example, every evening I shower, make my lunch for the next day, and spend 10 or so minutes doing something that relaxes me in bed, whether that's scrolling through social media, reading 15 pages of a book, or talking to my parents on the phone. It's not always like this, but the consistency helps me fall asleep better and feel prepared to conquer the day ahead.

4. Re-Do Your Bedroom for a Better Night's Sleep

Especially when you're busy or stressed, it can be hard to get your best sleep every night, even with an awesome routine. Instead, try creating a space where you'll always feel good going to bed by trying out these seven quick DIY projects.

5. Find an Energizing Midday Activity That's Good for You

You probably saw it coming, but just as important as setting a schedule for your mornings and evenings is also having an activity that is guaranteed to bring you out of the worst midday slumps.

6. Make Your Lunch (and Dinner)

Making your meals every day not only guarantees you have control over your health, but it's also cheaper and a great way to learn a new skill or experiment with your cooking abilities.

Plus, you get to boast to co-workers when they ask where you got the food. And for some brag-worthy recipes, check out these 52 lunches, or, for the lazy, these quick office snack ideas.

7. Then Eat it Away From Your Desk

Muse writer Kat Boogaard learned many valuable lessons after bravely eating lunch away from her desk. For one thing, taking a break is just good for you. But, she also realized the importance of practicing work-life balance all day, rather than just after work was over. By giving yourself that time off during office hours, you're already one step closer to a healthier, well-balanced life.

8. Watch a TED Talk

TED Talks are like a mini-lecture. They just might teach you more about yourself, orinspire you to innovate and carry out that dream you've always thought about. Plus, they're only about 20 minutes--watch one while getting ready for work in the morning, or during your lunch break, or when you're sitting in a waiting room for a super-quick knowledge boost.

9. Listen to a Podcast

Similarly, podcasts are a great on-the-go news source. And a lot of the time they're just what you need to unwind without completely wasting away in front of the TV (not that I have anything against relaxing that way). I'm a big fan of tackling one podcast during my commute--half of it on the way to work, half on the way back, and the stories always bring out some real emotions. (For reference, my favorites are This American Life and You're the Expert.)

10. Do a Bunch of Little Productive Tasks

I challenge you to set aside 30 minutes and do all those nitty-gritty tasks you've been meaning to do, all at once. First, this prevents you from multitasking later on when emails are rushing in while you're trying to do your work. Second, it forces you to tackle those things that make you cringe--things that, once they're done, will make your life a heck of a lot easier.

Not sure what chores I mean? I'll help you out--here's a to-do list of 21 useful things you can do in five minutes, then, if those don't do it for you, here are nine other productive things you can complete in 15 minutes.

11. Get to Know Yourself

What better way to improve your life than by learning all about your strengths and weaknesses and honing in on your best self. To get started, here are 14 free personality test you can take in the next half hour.

12. Treat Yourself

How long has it been since you treated yourself to a relaxing massage or a manicure? Well, maybe this is your week to do it. Was there a game you've been meaning to download and play? Or, a cool new lunch spot? You deserve it, so go get it (just don't overdo your 30 minutes of leisure, especially on the job).

13. Revisit Your Goals

You probably made some New Year's resolutions or set monthly goals for yourself (whether on paper or in the back of your mind). Have you followed through on any of them? Are there ones you can get rid of, or alter? Do

you feel confident in achieving all of them? Take some time this week to reflect positively on how far you've come, and think about where you want to be-;and maybe write down the steps you need to take to get there.

14. Connect With an Old Friend or New Co-worker

If it's been a while since you've seen or talked to someone, reach out and let them know you're thinking about them. Maybe even try it the old-fashioned way--sending a physical letter! There's no doubt snail mail makes anyone's day. (Isn't it the worst when you open your mailbox to nothing?)

Or, if you haven't had a chance to meet a colleague in another department at the office, or a new co-worker who just joined last week, consider meeting up for lunch or coffee. You'll make a work friend (or, eventually a work wife or husband), and, even better, you'll build up your network.

(Bonus: Studies show that hanging around good people leads to better lifestyle choices!)

15. Clean Your Closet

By "closet" I could also mean your desk, your office, your bedroom, or even your kitchen cabinets or dishes. Cleaning is stress-relieving, and actually a form of mindful meditation, according to some studies. So, kill two birds with one stone by reorganizing your spaceand practicing positive self-awareness.

16. Get Outside

Notice how I didn't say "go to the gym" or "go for a run." Because, yes, exercise is great. But for most people, including myself, it's a lot easier said than done.

So, I have another option for you--go outside. Walk around, sit in the park and read, or go for a leisurely bike ride. Just being outdoors is good for you in so many ways. It improves creativity, helps us age better, makes us happier, and, it might actually make you want to work out more (science says so!).