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10 easy ways to streamline your day

Learn how to simplify your daily routine for a more stress-free you

By Sarah Jio



Are your mornings crazed, afternoons jam-packed and evenings less-than-restful? Always feel behind the eight-ball, running from one task to the next? We hear you! Yes, a personal assistant or an “easy” button could help, but here are some slightly more practical ways we all can learn to streamline our days—and all the pesky to-dos on the list—for less stress.

1. Shop for groceries on certain days of the week.

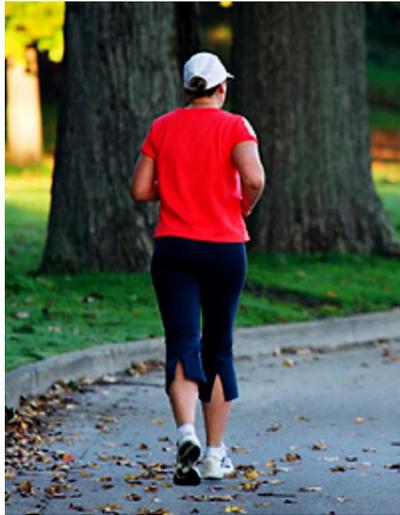


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When you hit the grocery store, do you feel like a contestant on *The Amazing Race* as you push your cart through crowded aisles and jockey for the last box of frozen waffles? “If possible, try to grocery-shop on Monday or Tuesday morning, when stores are less crowded,” suggests Stephanie Vozza, author of *The Five-Minute Mom’s Club*. Even at

peak hours, she says, stores will be less hectic earlier in the week, since most people stock up on their essentials on the weekend and revisit later in the week when they run out of bread and milk. And help out with the bagging, she adds. "Combine groceries and items that you store at home together in one bag," she says. *Photo: iStockphoto*

Work out in the morning.



Sure, fitness at any time of day is better than no fitness at all, but many experts say that when it comes to banishing stress and setting a great foundation for your day, the morning is the ideal time to get your heart rate up. Not only will you feel better about scratching fitness off your to-do list early in the day, but exercise also boosts energizing endorphins, which can help power you through hectic mornings. Morning workouts may also help you sleep better. While the jury is still out on whether late-evening exercise causes sleep disturbances or not, sleep experts generally warn against working out right before bedtime, which may interfere with the temperature regulation your body needs for sleep. *Photo: iStockphoto*

At work or home do the unpleasant tasks first.



What do you dread most on your to-do list? Whatever it is, start there, says Tsh Kenreider, founder of SimpleMom.net, a site where she and other contributors pass on simple living and organizational advice. "There's a classic business principle called 'eat that frog'—the idea is that if you do the worst thing on your plate first thing in the morning, the rest of the day is a cakewalk," she says. "It's taken from this Mark Twain quote: 'Eat a live frog every morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.'" So your least favorite chore is cleaning the bathroom? Tackle that first. "This way, you can spend the rest of your day knowing you've done the most irritating task," says Kenreider, who uses the principle in her own life—daily. "This lowers my stress tremendously because I've wiped off my plate that feeling that I should be doing more, or that I'm behind on my day. I've already done my hardest task—what's there to stress about?" *Photo: Thinkstock*

Reverse your dinner-breakfast caloric intake.



You know that eating breakfast is great for your health. But let your breakfast curb your stress and power you through the day with even greater oomph by following the advice of Debbie Mandel, a stress-management expert and author of *Addicted to Stress*. "Make breakfast your biggest meal of the day and dinner your smallest," she says. "Have a power

breakfast of lean proteins, complex carbs, fruits or vegetables, the way they do in other countries. Lean proteins fuel your brain to think straight, and complex carbs, like oatmeal or multigrain bread, keep you in a good mood." *Photo: iStockphoto*

Don't answer emails first thing in the morning.



When you wake up, do you run to your computer or smartphone to check messages? That's a no-no, says Susan Fletcher, PhD, a psychologist in Plano, Texas. Dr. Fletcher says that the most successful and least stressed people have learned to take charge of email—and not let it summon them at all hours of the day. That's important, she says, because starting your day with email can often tie up your time, making you less productive and putting you behind on other important tasks. Instead, try this trick: "Designate time midday to check and respond to emails," she says. If you need more time for email, limit yourself to an hourly check-in, and give yourself only about five minutes to do it. Then turn off the chime on your computer or phone so that the email doesn't "call out to you"—beckoning you to waste more time. *Photo: Thinkstock*

Cook dinner for the week on Sunday.



If weeknight dinners stress you out, try prepping or batch-cooking food for at least two midweek meals on Sunday night. "Cooking some dishes on the weekend for the workweek ahead lightens the load," says Mandel. "On Sunday, the whole family can help you out, from menu planning to shopping to cooking." Meals like lasagnas, enchiladas and casseroles freeze well and can easily be reheated. For recipe ideas, check out [Ana Jacobini's](#) new book [Cook & Freeze: 100 Delicious Dishes to Serve Now and Later](#). *Photo: Sang An/Woman's Day*

Can your phone help you get organized.



Could the secret to being more organized and less stressed be your cell phone? "One of the best ways to deal with stress is as simple as providing yourself with an organization plan for your day, your week, your month," says Patricia Carrell, PhD, a psychologist and the author of *How to Be Your Own Therapist*. If a daily planner isn't working for you, consider a phone app. [reCall](#), a new app for iPhone, Android and BlackBerry phones, lets you organize your to-do lists, projects and other daily worries into actionable tasks. Best part? It's free!

Use individual laundry baskets.



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1 Start your day the night before.



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