

This 30-Day Therapist-Approved Challenge Will Help You Transform Your Morning Routine

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Here's how every morning should go: roll out of bed (feeling energized and positive!), calmly and purposefully complete your morning routine, and start your day feeling clear and confident. But that's rarely how it goes, right? Personally, no matter how hard I try, my mornings are a jumble of random to-do list items, ruled exercise, and stress over the coming day. Not exactly a setup for success.

If you're in the same boat, say hello to our 30-Day Transform Your Morning Challenge. This is a month-long routine reset to help you (and me) start the day on the right foot, because your morning habits don't just impact your energy or productivity levels — they actually have an effect on your broader mental health.

"Building routines into each morning helps us to feel more calm and focused throughout the day," said Judy Ho, PhD, a clinical and forensic neuropsychologist. And being intentional with that routine is good for your mental health "because it creates space for us to take things slow," added psychotherapist Alyssa Mancao, LCSW. "Having a morning routine that calms and soothes you can create a calming tone throughout the day. It can influence the way we perceive and experience the day, and has the power to help us start the day in a good mood."

30-Day Transform Your Morning Challenge

Here's how the challenge works: Ahead, we're giving you 30 simple, actionable activities you can do in the morning to improve your mental health. Go in order and try one activity each morning. Notice how each task feels and note down your favorites, exploring how your body and mind respond. By the last day of the challenge, you should have a list of activities and habits that work for you: a ready-made morning routine.

The following prompts were created by Mancao, Dr. Ho, and psychotherapist Eunice Blakely, LPC, so read on to get their expert recommendations (and explanations), then set your alarms, create your calendar, and get ready to revamp your morning routine.

1 Day 1: Do Energizing Stretches in Bed

Start the day with five minutes of stretches in bed. "Stretching is a practice that increases blood flow to our muscles and can help us relieve stress," Mancao said. Dr. Ho recommended simple stretches like:

- **Star stretch:** spread your arms and legs like a star and hold for 20 to 30 seconds
- **Knees to chest:** hug your knees to your chest for 20 to 30 seconds
- **Seated forward fold:** sit with your legs straight out in front of you and reach for your toes for 20 to 30 seconds

2 Day 2: Drink a Glass of Water

Fill up a "tall, cool glass of water" to drink and help you wake up, Dr. Ho said. "Drinking water, even before your morning coffee or tea, helps the body and its organs rehydrate after being asleep," Blakely added.

3 Day 3: Try Breathwork

Breathwork isn't as intimidating as it sounds! Today, take 10 deep breaths and recite an uplifting phrase or intention to start your day. "The combo will help you to achieve calm in the morning," Dr. Ho said. "Feel free to repeat as needed during a busy day." (If you want to try a different form of breathwork, try this [gentle technique](#), and for more guidance, check out these [tips for beginners](#).)

4 Day 4: Choose 3 Things to Accomplish Before Midday

It's normal to feel overwhelmed by the number of tasks you have in front of you on any given day. Today, take a moment to prioritize, selecting three things you want to get done before noon. "This will help you to focus more on those tasks and the associated tasks that may come along with them," Blakely said, rather than getting pulled in different directions.

5 Day 5: Get Some Sunlight

Sit or stand in the sun for 20 minutes while you go through your morning routine, eating breakfast, checking the news, or exercising. You can go outside, sit by a window, or use a bright lamp, light box, red light, or LED light if the sun isn't out or is hard to get to. "It's important to get your vitamin D and also some exposure to sunlight to regulate your circadian rhythm and boost mood," Dr. Ho said. "Even 20 minutes of indirect sunlight through a window is helpful."

6 Day 6: Prioritize Your Day

What tasks are you hoping to get done today? This morning, take the time to prioritize what you *need* to get done versus what you *want* to get done in order to set the pace and tone for your day. If your day "looks too hectic or stressful at a glance," Blakely said, "make necessary adjustments and eliminations."

7 Day 7: Do 1 Activity Mindfully

Choose one activity this morning and commit to doing it mindfully, without distractions like checking your phone or listening to music. Try brushing your teeth, taking a shower, or making or drinking coffee mindfully, Dr. Ho suggested. "You'll find your mind is much more settled and you enjoy that activity more."

8 Day 8: Set a Value-Based Intention

"Set one intention for the day based on your values," Dr. Ho said. This is different from a to-do list item. "Values are not things you can check off, but things that you want your life to stand for . . . Things like honesty, adventure, community, knowledge, and integrity are some examples." Commit to one way you'll honor that value today. (If your value is community, for example, reach out to a friend you haven't spoke to in a while.)

9 Day 9: Take Quiet Time Before You Get Out of Bed

Before you get out of bed, reach for your phone, or start stressing out about the day, take a moment to breathe and center yourself. "This will help set the tone for the day and stop you from feeling rushed," Blakely said.

10 Day 10: Clean Up Your Space

You don't have to break out a vacuum or your dusting supplies; simply take two to three minutes and remove physical clutter from a small area, like a table, a counter, or a desk. "The less cluttered your physical space, the less cluttered your mind," Dr. Ho explained.

11 Day 11: Name Your Feelings

This morning, take a few minutes to listen to your thoughts and feelings, identify them, and shift them if you need to, Blakely said. "If you awaken in an anxious or worried state of mind," for example, take a few deep breaths and "replace those thoughts with more affirming ones." Acknowledge your feelings and boost your confidence with phrases like "I am strong and capable" or "I can accomplish my goals today."

12 Day 12: Journal About 3 Things You're Grateful For

Today, write down three things you're grateful for, no matter how small they may seem.

"Gratitude practice is very helpful to boosting mood, enhancing well-being, and increasing feelings of community and connection to others," Dr. Ho said. And it's important to actually put your practice on paper because "it makes it more concrete," she explains, and helps your grateful thoughts "stick in your mind longer and affect how you approach the day."

13 Day 13: Read Something Inspiring

Take a minute or two to read something that inspires you, Dr. Ho said. This can be a few paragraphs from your favorite book, quotes from someone you admire, or a poem; something that lifts your spirit and helps you feel strong.

14 Day 14: Preschedule Your Breaks

Once you get into your day, it's easy to get swept up in the flow of work, school, or family obligations and forget to take a much-needed break. Take a moment this morning to look at your schedule and set aside two to three break times, including lunch. "Taking a break away from work helps your overall health," Blakely explained; working continuously is stressful and hard on your body and mind.

15 Day 15: Exercise

Even if you're more of a night workout person, take at least 10 minutes this morning to move and get your blood and endorphins pumping. "Get creative," Dr. Ho suggested. "If you are short on time, even doing some household chores with a fast pace to dance music will work! You can certainly get something out of even a 10- to 15-minute session."

16 Day 16: Take a Deep Breath and Say "Thank You For This Day"

Before you open your eyes today, take a deep breath and express gratitude for the day. "It helps to settle into your morning with a thought that expresses gratitude toward the day," Mancao explained. "Thoughts influence feelings, and creating the foundation for gratitude in the morning can be very helpful practice that helps you ease into the day."

17 Day 17: Journal 3 Goals For the Day

Commit to three goals or specific intentions you want to accomplish today, things like "I will take things one task at a time" or "I will stay grounded." Mancao said these types of goals "can help set the tone for the day" while keeping us grounded, goal-oriented, and less stressed.

18 Day 18: Start With the Most Difficult Task on Your To-Do List

On an overwhelming day, it's helpful to start with the most difficult project on your to-do list, Dr. Ho said. "This helps you to feel a sense of achievement early in the day." No matter what the task is, jump in before you can get intimidated or talk yourself out of it.

19 Day 19: Identify an Affirmation For Your Day

An affirmation is a short statement that serves as a commitment to manifest something into reality. These phrases help to shape your outlook on life and the present moment, Mancao said. "Because of the correlation between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, identifying an affirmation can subsequently shift your thoughts and behaviors during the day." Choose one that represents what you want to do and who you want to be today. Write it down or repeat it to yourself to solidify it in your mind. Examples of affirmations include:

- I can choose how I respond to what's around me.
- I am strong, resilient, and capable.
- I understand that nothing is permanent, and I am centered and balanced no matter what.

20 Day 20: Mindfully Lotion Your Body

Grab lotion in a soothing scent and take a moment to apply it to your hands and body. "Slow down, pay attention, and focus" as you do so, Blakely said. This will help you stay mindful and root yourself in the present while providing a little self-care.

21 Day 21: Do a "Brain Dump" to Create Your To-Do List

"To-do lists are much harder to deal with in your head than if you put them on paper," Dr. Ho said. Today, set a timer for five minutes and write down everything you need to do today. When the time is up, organize and prioritize your list based on what needs to be done today, when it needs to be done, and what you can save for tomorrow.

22 Day 22: Don't Check Notifications Before Breakfast

"The moment we check our phones, we are searching for notifications," Mancao said: things we need to respond or react to. "These things require us to give parts of ourselves," she explained. "If we're not careful, we might end up multitasking these notifications with our morning routine and thus missing the experience of the morning." Instead, avoid checking your phone until you've had breakfast or are ready to transition out of your morning routine and into the rest of your day. This will help you stay present and focused and, as Blakely added, keep you on track and on time to hit the ground running.

23 Day 23: Make Your Bed

Take a couple minutes today to simply make your bed before you move on with the rest of your day. (If making your bed is already part of your routine, make a point of doing it mindfully and staying focused.) By doing so, you've "completed a positive task," Mancao said. This helps to boost your mood and sparks your motivation to complete other tasks. It's also a "sign of honoring the place where you rest," she added, a place you look forward to coming back to at the end of the day.

24 Day 24: Take a Shower With Essential Oils

Showering with essential oils like lavender, peppermint, or wintergreen can help to "invigorate your mind and get you ready for the day," Blakely explained. If you don't have any essential oils on hand, choose a body wash or soap in a strong scent that helps you wake up.

25 Day 25: Put Appointments and Reminders in Your Calendar

If you tend to lose track of time during the day, use this morning to make sure your daily calendar is accurate and up to date. Schedule in any appointments, classes, or meetings, and set reminders for them. "This will help you to stay on track in case the day gets a little hectic," Blakely said.

26 Day 26: Slow Down Your Skin-Care Routine

Today, time how long it takes you to complete your morning skin-care routine and see if you can add an extra minute or two, Mancao said. "Make this a mindful self-care practice where you are massaging the products into your skin," she said. That way, you're making self-care part of your routine as well as letting yourself slow down instead of rushing through your face-washing ritual, which can create stress.

27 Day 27: Read 10 Pages of a Book

Grab any book — the novel you're reading, an old favorite, any book that you like or is helpful to you — and read about 10 pages before you start your day. "Shifting our attention from a screen to page can be transformative for our mental health," Mancao said. "Regular reading can help with reducing stress and increasing mental stimulation."

28 Day 28: Avoid Having Heavy Conversations First Thing

If you know you have to have a tough or complicated conversation with a friend, family member, coworker, or classmate today, don't force yourself to do it first thing. Instead, "transition into your day gracefully and peacefully," Blakely said. Schedule a specific time for that conversation later in the day.

29 Day 29: Write Out Your Worries For 10 Minutes

If you wake up anxious, you'll love today's challenge: take 10 minutes to write down all the things you're stressed or worried about. "Releasing our worries via journaling can have positive mental health benefits such as reducing stress and increasing self-reflection," Mancao said. It's OK to wake up feeling stressed, she added, but we don't have to internalize that anxiety and carry it with us throughout the day. Today's task can help you let those thoughts go.

30 Day 30: Listen to an Inspirational Podcast

While you're getting dressed, having breakfast, or taking a shower, put on an inspiring TED Talk or podcast to "set yourself up for success," Blakely said. "You will be surprised at what you pick up in passing" just by listening to something uplifting in the background.