CREATING HEALTHY ROUTINES

TOOLS 2 THRIVE

Work, paying bills, cleaning, cooking, shopping, exercising, getting enough sleep, and taking care of children are just some of the things millions of Americans do each day and it is easy to be overwhelmed. It can feel impossible to get everything done, let alone take care of yourself – especially if you're already struggling with a mental health concern like depression or anxiety. By creating routines, we organize our days in such a way that taking care of tasks and ourselves becomes a pattern that makes it easier to get things done without having to think hard about them.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Create the routine that is right for you. We don't all have the same schedules or responsibilities and some of us struggle with certain parts of daily life more than others. All healthy routines should include eating a nutrition-rich diet, exercising, and getting enough sleep, but no two routines will be exactly the same. In fact, your routine may not even be exactly the same every day.

Start small. Changing up your day-to-day routine all at once probably won't end up with lasting results. Pick one small thing each week to work on. It could be adding something new and positive, or cutting out a bad habit. Small changes add up.

Add to your existing habits. You probably already have some habits worked into your routine, like drinking a cup of coffee in the morning. Try adding new habits to existing ones. For instance, if you want to read more, you could set aside ten minutes to read while you have your coffee (instead of drinking it on your drive to work).

Make swaps. Think about the things you do during the day that aren't so healthy and swap them with better behaviors. For example, if you feel sluggish in the afternoons and eat sugary snacks for a quick pick-me-up, try taking a brisk walk instead to get your blood pumping and endorphins flowing. Or if you find yourself having a few alcoholic drinks after a long stressful day, try sipping hot tea instead.

Plan ahead. When life gets hectic, you may be tempted to skip out on the new parts of your daily routine. By doing things like prepping meals ahead of time, picking out an outfit the night before work, or having an alternate home workout option for the days you can't make it to the gym, you help set yourself up for success even when you're hurried.

Make time for things you enjoy. Even if it's just 15 minutes a day, set aside time to do something you find fun or relaxing—it will release chemical messengers in your body that are good for your physical and mental health.

Reward yourself for small victories. Set goals and celebrate when you reach them. Have you added exercise to your weekly routine and worked out every day as planned for the last couple weeks? Treat yourself! Watch a movie you've been wanting to see or try out that new video game.

Don't beat yourself up if you miss a day. Making life changes can be hard and you might forget to do something that is new to your routine every once in a while. You don't have to be perfect, just try to do better the next day.

FAST FACTS

When it comes to diet, sleep and exercise, having good, strong routines is linked to improved mental and physical health.[1]

People with more daily routines have lower levels of distress when facing problems with their health or negative life events.[2]

It takes an average of 66 days for a behavior to become automatic (a habit), but for some people it can take as long as 8 ½ months.[3] Don't give up!

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT MHASCREENING.ORG TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.

It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

[1]Haines, J., McDonald, J., O'Brien, A., Sherry, B., Bottino, C., Scmidt, M.E., Taveras, E.M. (2013) Healthy habits, happy homes: randomized trial to improve household routines among pre-school-aged children. *JAMA Pediatrics,* 167,1072-1090.

[2]Williams, J. (2000) Effects of activity limitation and routinization on mental health. *The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research, 20,*100S-105S.

[3]Lallly, P., Van Jaarsveld, C.H.M., Potts, H.W.W., Wardle, J. (2010). How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.*, 40, 998-1009.

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PLANNING YOUR ROUTINE

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR ROUTINE?

Examples: exercise, reading, quality time with my kids

1._____

2._____

3._____

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF YOU ACCOMPLISHING YOUR GOALS OR TASKS ABOVE?

Examples: working overtime, needing new glasses, too tired

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

WHAT ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO ADDRESS THE BARRIERS YOU WROTE DOWN IN THE BOX TO THE LEFT?

Examples: start with a 30 min walk, go to bed earlier

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

Use this calendar to lay out things you can change and incorporate into your schedule. The calendar can include specific things you want to incorporate into your routine (like a specific exercise), or changes you need to make to reduce barriers (like going to bed early). Use the support column to think of people or things you can use to help you accomplish your goals.

ACTIVITY	SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUPPORT

HOW CAN YOU REWARD YOURSELF FOR SUCCESSFULLY MAKING NEW THINGS PART OF YOUR ROUTINE?

Example: if I walk for 30 min, 3 times per week for 2 weeks, I can treat myself to a dinner out.

1._____

2._____

3._____