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HEALTH

MAKE EVERY MINUTE COUNT!

Stuck in a rut? Fed up of the daily grind? It's time to have the best day ever

By Jo Usmar

Going through the motions every day, following the same old routine, can make life a slog. A recent survey by Salary.com found that 24 per cent of people believe they waste at least an hour every day. That's more than two weeks a year spent doing, well, nothing, when you could have been making life that bit brighter. So we've come up with a plan for having the most awesome time. Every. Single. Day.

7.11AM BE ALARMED

What? Get out of bed as soon as your alarm goes off.
Why? With experts championing longer, uninterrupted shut-eye over lower-quality "snooze" sleep, it's better to set your alarm for when you'll actually get up, rather than when you can press snooze three times. "One of the problems with the snooze button is that it disrupts the body's natural sleep cycle," explains sleep expert Dr Neil Stanley. "The body starts preparing to wake up an hour before you open your eyes. But if you snooze, you may then start falling into a deeper sleep, which could leave you feeling groggy when you do eventually have to get up."

8.36AM MIND THE COMMUTE

What? Practise mindfulness on your journey to work. Tune your senses into what's going on around you by talking yourself through it, for example: "I can see a row of trees and hear birds singing."
Why? Trials have shown mindfulness can reduce stress, regulate mood and increase feelings of control*. "Taking time to be in the moment will give your head a break from any negative thoughts," says clinical psychologist Dr Jessamy Hibberd.

10.22AM ATTACK A SNACK

What? When it's peckish o'clock, step away from the biscuit tin! "Go for a small handful of walnut halves if you feel hungry



between breakfast and lunch," advises nutritionist Kim Pearson.
Why? "Walnuts are packed with omega 3, which boosts memory and keeps your mood high," she says.

11.43AM PLAY THE YES/NO GAME

What? Relieve physical tension with some simple - and fun - exercises at your desk. "Ask yourself light-hearted questions such as: 'Should I ask out Tim from accounts?' then either nod or shake your head to answer," says personal trainer Joanna Ebsworth. "If it's a 'yes', move your head gently backwards before taking your chin to your chest several times. If the answer is 'no', move your head slowly from side to side until you feel looser."
Why? Sitting still for long periods affects your body and mind. "It can wreak havoc on your joints, muscles and energy levels," says Joanna. "These exercises will relieve stiffness, take your mind off stress and make you smile."

1.07PM MAKE LIFE A PICNIC

What? Grab a friend for an alfresco lunch.
Why? With 54 per cent of UK workers not leaving their desk to eat**, it's time to reclaim your lunch break. Studies show that workers who leave the office for lunch are more content and creative in the afternoon. Plus, getting away from your desk gives your eyes a break from your screen and gets blood flowing around your body, so more oxygen reaches your brain and makes you more alert," says Joanna. "A healthy lunch energises you for the rest of the day, while the picnic set-up outside gives you the feeling of being on holiday - even if temporarily."

5.01PM JOG ON

What? Hit the park for some post-work exercise.
Why? "Five o' clock is the perfect time to work out as your strength and endurance levels are peaking, so you'll perform better and burn more calories," says Joanna. Plus, 94 per cent of people who exercise outdoors say that the fresh air makes them feel better mentally as well as physically†. "Warm up for 5-10 minutes by walking or jogging," advises Joanna. "Then introduce intervals - so power-walk, jog or run with full effort for 30 seconds, then slow down for one minute so your body recovers. Repeat for 15-20 minutes in total. This style of training is proven to get you fitter faster than training at one pace."

6.44PM GO THAI

What? Whip up a Thai green curry for dinner, using curry paste, coconut milk, vegetables and a protein of your choice, such as seafood, organic meat, quorn or tofu. Serve with 50g brown rice.
Why? "This meal provides a mixture of proteins, vegetables and complex carbohydrates," says Kim. "It'll not only fill you up, but release energy throughout the evening, so you'll be less likely to crave an unhealthy dessert."

7.24PM GET FRIENDLY

What? See a mate or call a friend for a chat.
Why? Researchers at the London School of Economics found that people's happiness levels rose by more than eight per cent when they were with their friends. "Social support is a crucial part of feeling good," says Dr Hibberd. "Talking about your day and chatting through any problems can give you a different perspective and help you see the funny side of situations."

10.13PM LISTEN UP

What? Make a pre-bedtime playlist that's at least half an hour long, choosing songs that remind you of happy times.
Why? "Listening to music is great, as it's less stimulating than going online or watching the TV," says Dr Hibberd. Research suggests you should switch off your TV, computer and mobile phone an hour before trying to sleep, as the artificial light their screens emit suppresses the release of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, making it harder for you to nod off†. But, if you really can't drag yourself away from your gadgets, download Flux (free, Justgetflux.com) - this app tints your screens to follow natural sunlight patterns. **F**