

The Ideal Day

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It's such a perfect day Lou Reed once sang. But how do you plan to have a perfect day? Most people never think about how to set themselves up to have a great day even though that is what a great life consists of- great days. Here are a few ideas.

It is 3 am and hopefully you are sound asleep. Your body temperature is at its lowest. Even though you snooze on, your brain is still 80 % activated. It is busy consolidating memories restocking proteins, repairing cell damage, and strengthening synapses.

Soon you will have one of the 200,000 dreams in your life. REM or dream sleep is important for memory consolidation. If you are a woman you have a greater chance that this dream will be a nightmare.

Not getting enough sleep really makes it hard to have a great day. If you sleep less than 6 hours, is like being 0.5 blood alcohol. One week of restricted sleep is like 24 hours of consecutive wakefulness (or having consumed ten beers). Sleep loss impairs the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, which means you age faster, and it helps you gain weight. 60 % of people who sleep less than 5 hours a night are obese.

Between 3 and 4 am is the peak time for night-work errors, for auto and truck crashes, of heart failure and gastric ulcer crises.

Rise early about 7.00 am. Waking up causes violent increases in heart rate and blood pressure and a peak in blood levels of cortisol so start the day gradually.

The first half hour after waking your performance is woeful so this is not the time for major

decisions. After a warm bath or shower is a good time for stretching, exercises involving balance, accuracy and fine motor control. Tai Chi is perfect, (Morning favours the archer and the surgeon, late afternoon the swimmer and the runner)

Breakfast should be high protein low carbohydrate to kick-start your mood and concentration- a protein shake smoothie with berries, an omelette and a glass of milk. Avoid the juices and the muffins. Consider taking a good quality multi-vitamin and 1000 mg of fish oil.

At 8 am blood platelets are more abundant and stickier making it a good time to shave, as you won't bleed to death but the worst time for heart attacks. 8 am is the peak time for death so if you make it past 8 am you can rest easy. Testosterone peaks at this time.

Now is a good time to have one of the two coffees you drink each day, Caffeine binds with the receptors for adenosine a natural chemical important in wakefulness. Replace coffee with green tea during the day.

Your temperature increases across the day from a low of 97 degrees in the early hours to an average of 98.4 degrees for women and 98.1 degrees for men. Alertness often rises with body temperature.

Pack some water, the remaining smoothie, a few handfuls of almonds and a turkey and salad roll to take with you might be good supplies for the day.

It's time to get focused, Young people are easily bothered by distractions in the early morning

much more so than in the afternoon. So lessen the distractions and don't multi-task at this time,

What happens when we try to do two things at once is that neither gets completed nor learned. Multi-tasking means it takes 50 % longer to do things. For example, talking on a mobile phone while driving increases the risk of crash by 1.3 times, dialling and texting triples the risk.

Increase the amount of incidental exercise you have in a day. Take the stairs. Going down the stairs is like an energetic walk; going up them equivalent to running, Moderate exercise makes us feel less tired

Between 2 and a half to 4 hours after you woke up, your attention will peak. Use this time for the information you really need to learn, Restrict peak hours for focused attention tasks.

Late morning is also the best time to learn new motor skills.

Lunchtime

Lunch is ideally the major meal of the day. Try to follow the Mediterranean diet -whole grains, fish, nuts, legumes, olive oil, fruits, vegetables & potatoes. Sit quietly for 5 minutes after you finish eating and then walk for 15 minutes

Try to keep your eating pattern fairly regular as food intake sets internal body clocks. Just by living you burn between 50 and 70 % of the energy you consume- 20 % goes to the brain, 10 % to the heart and kidneys, 20 % to the liver, and up to 10% for digestion. Squirming, fiddling,

If you can, a 15- 20-minute nap increases performance and learning. Napping also reduces the chances of heart attacks and recharges your mental batteries. Winston Churchill said a nap gave you two days in one. Thomas Edison, Leonardo da Vinci and President Lyndon Johnson were all great nappers.

Early Afternoon

Lots of people have a down time around 2.30- 3.30 in the afternoon when they make more mistakes and learn least well. This is not a great time for taking in new information or talking

through relationship issues. If you do have to take in details either move around while doing it or take very good notes.

During the afternoon it is good to have snacks for mood and energy lifting. Almonds and apples are especially good.

3.30-4.30 is a time to drive carefully. Single vehicle accidents are common at this time (as they are around 2-4 am)

Blood pressure runs higher in the afternoon but it is not a bad time to go to the dentist. Anaesthesia for dentistry lasts 3 times as long as the same amount given in the morning.

Late afternoon

Optimal time for physical activity. Your body is generally at its best later in the day. Exercise at this time may result in 20 % more muscle strength than in the morning, The heart works more efficiently, reaction time is at its peak, core body temperature is at its peak, Most sports records are set between 3 and 8 pm. Liver function is at its best between 5 and 6 pm.

Evening

Meditate 20 minutes before dinner. Dinner should be lighter than lunch and at least 3 hours before your bedtime. It takes about 50% longer for the stomach to empty dinner than lunch, Sit quietly 5 minutes after you finish eating then walk for 15 minutes

About 9.30 commence the wind down for the day. Soak in a warm bath. An hour or so before bed lower the lights - use lamps, sip herbal tea, create to do lists for tomorrow. Melatonin starts to increase in the evening.

If you are learning new information listen to a tape or podcast of key information for about 20 minutes.

Go to bed ideally by 10.30 pm. Don't watch TV or work in bed. Remember the sleep cycle occurs every 90-120 minutes. Try to catch it.