

Peace and love

MINDFULNESS TEACHER AND WORKPLACE WELLNESS FACILITATOR KRISTY VON MINOEN SHARES STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING RELAXATION AND GRATITUDE IN THE LEAD-UP TO CHRISTMAS

CREATING CALM

As the end of the year nears and our plates (and diaries) feel fuller than ever, stress can start becoming a way of life. One simple tip for taking back control is to establish a calming morning routine.

As the saying goes: win the morning, win the day.

Checking your phone first thing, multitasking and rushing out the door are all likely to tip you into a 'fight or flight' state, activated by the sympathetic strand of your nervous system.

The earlier we engage the 'fight or flight' response, the more likely the nervous system is to establish this as your default setting, meaning you will feel more anxious and sensitive to stressors throughout the day. Creating a morning routine that promotes 'rest and digest' is key to setting your day up for calm.



5 ways to promote your relaxation response in the morning

1
10 x diaphragmatic breaths as soon as you wake up
Slow, deep stomach breathing sends signal to your brain that you are not Try putting your hands on your torso and focusing on the rise and fall, not extending the exhale and relaxing your body.

2
Keep off your phone
Most of us reach for our smartphones the minute we rise, checking time messages and our calendar before brain has had a chance to wake up can also end up wasting time on a media and, before we know it, we're running late.

3
Do things slowly
Set your alarm a little earlier and the urge to rush out the door - this danger signals to your brain

4
Five minutes of mindfulness
Try either a quick guided meditation using an app (Headspace or Calm) or simply engage your senses by listening to the birds outside, enjoying the taste and smell of morning coffee.

5
Get moving
Try some gentle exercise before gets away on you - movement calms the stress response and gets the endorphins flowing.

Rituals

The science of gratitude

We all know that being grateful is good for us, but did you know there is strong scientific evidence to suggest that a regular gratitude practice can have a profound and positive impact on our brain? Kristy von Minden explains how to incorporate this into your summer routine.

Our brain has an inbuilt negativity bias.

This means we are more sensitive to unpleasant news and events. It also means we don't pay as much attention to and tend to forget life's more positive experiences.

This bias most likely evolved from an evolutionary need to keep us out of harm's way. Survival depended on our ability to notice and react to danger. However, in these safe and abundant times, this doesn't always serve us well. By regularly pausing to express what we are grateful for, we can rewire our brains to scan for and notice the good.

Researchers suggest that it actually changes our mindset - the more you

practise feeling and expressing gratitude, the more easily gratitude will come to you spontaneously in the future.

It feels good while we are practising it, too. Our brain is flooded with the chemical dopamine, which rewards us with a natural high and motivates us to continue to be thankful.


Research on gratitude shows that these neurological effects also open the doors to many other health benefits, including decreased pain levels, better sleep, more energy, and reduced stress, anxiety and depression.


The key with a gratitude practice is establishing it as a part of your daily routine so it becomes effortless.

Find something you do every day as a trigger to remind you, for example:

- » Write three things you're grateful for on the shower wall while your conditioner sets
- » Write in a journal first thing while you enjoy your morning cup of tea
- » Practise with your loved ones at the dinner table.

It can help to share with others, to really embed the experience in your brain. This Christmas could be a great time to sit with your family and each name three immaterial things you are grateful for.

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Gratitude