University of Richmond Employee Wellness

How to Become a Morning Person

Deep in the labyrinth of your DNA, a small collection of genes exerts a powerful influence on whether you are a morning or an evening person. Also shaping your inherent tendency toward morning-ness or evening-ness are a number of other influences — hormones, sunlight, age, and even where on the planet you live. If you’re naturally inclined to be more active and productive at night, can you override these biological and environmental influences? Can you intentionally change yourself into a morning person? It won’t be easy — and it might not be permanent — but the answer seems to be yes.

Gradually change your bedtime. Whether you’re a lark or an owl, a good night’s sleep is important for your health. Sleep experts recommend that you start by going to sleep anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours earlier each night. Over a period of weeks, move your nighttime routine earlier and earlier until your bedtime allows you to get the requisite amount of sleep before your alarm goes off and the day begins.

Let lighting help you align your body’s clock. Your body has an inner clock that sets your circadian rhythms. That clock is highly sensitive to changes in light. In fact, your body is capable of releasing the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin in response to sunset-colored light. Dawn-like blue light, by contrast, stimulates a wake-up response in your body. You can use this light sensitivity to your benefit. Limit your exposure to devices that emit blue light (such as phones and tablets) close to bedtime, and opt for nightlights and bedside lamps with amber or red bulbs that mimic sleepy-time sunset colors.

Develop a soothing nighttime routine. Going to sleep isn’t as easy as switching off the lights. If you’re trying to override a lifelong habit of nighttime activity, it may help to create routines that send a bedtime signal to your brain. Gentle stretches, meditation, deep breathing, aromatherapy, reading books, journaling, and other calming rituals may help you develop a pleasant and relaxing nighttime routine that encourages an earlier start to your day.

Track the positive changes. As your sleep cycle begins to transition, you may notice changes to your energy levels, productivity, or mood. Make a note of these changes as you experience them, because reviewing the positive impacts may help you stay motivated on days when you’re feeling a bit sleepy or disoriented.

Incorporate exercise into your day. Studies show that you can use exercise to move your sleep phase earlier in the evening. In a study that tracked the exercise patterns and sleep cycles of 52 participants, people with an evening chronotype could advance their sleep cycle to an earlier time of day by exercising either in the morning or in the evening. The same study indicates that once you’ve shifted to a more morning-oriented sleep cycle, you should exercise early in the day to preserve your new sleeping pattern.

Give it time. Becoming a morning person literally won’t happen overnight. The more entrained your sleep patterns are, the longer it may take to revamp them. While it’s perfectly fine to let yourself hit the snooze button on a weekend morning or when you’re on vacation, try to honor your new schedule as much of the time as possible. In the long run, that consistency will deliver better results.

Source: Healthline
**Healthy Cooking: Healthier Peanut Butter Rice Krispies Treats**

**Ingredients:**
- 3/4 cup natural peanut butter
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 2 tsp. coconut oil
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- Optional: 1/2 cup collagen or protein powder
- 2.5-3 cups brown rice cereal or rice krispies
- 3.5 oz dark chocolate, broken into pieces

**Directions:**
1. Line an 8x8 pan with parchment paper and set to the side.
2. Place a medium pot over low heat and add in peanut butter, maple syrup, coconut oil, and vanilla extract. Mix until melted and smooth, about 1 minute.
3. Next add in protein powder (optional) and rice krispies cereal. Stir until combined with all of the cereal well-coated. Pour into prepared pan and flatten with a spatula until even.
4. Make chocolate topping by adding chocolate into a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring in between, until the chocolate is completely melted.
5. Pour melted chocolate over the bars and tilt the pan to spread the chocolate out evenly.
6. Place pan in the refrigerator to chill for 30 minutes or until the chocolate is set and the bars are completely cool. Sprinkle with flaky salt if you’d like and cut into bars.

---

**FEBRUARY 5TH** is National Wear Red Day!

Wear red to support women’s heart health and raise awareness for cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death in women. To show support, take a picture of yourself wearing red and post it on social media with the hashtags #wearredday and #goredrva.
Educational Corner: 4 Ways to Manage Anxiety

It’s no secret that we live in an increasingly uncertain world — be it politically, socially, or environmentally speaking. Questions like: “Will my views be represented in Congress?” “Will environmental protection initiatives receive support for my grandchildren?” “Will racial tensions continue to flare and result in more violence?” are but a few many folks find themselves asking on a constant basis. So the question remains: How do we cope during these precarious times?

1. **Breath-based emotional regulation and meditation.** Breathing-based regulation can be helpful in sociopolitical “hot” times. Whether watching the news or feeling anxious while on social media, your breath is always there to help you regulate your natural anxiety (or even anger). Deep breathing can help induce feelings of safety, though the trick with this method is consistency in practice. Consider practicing for 5 to 10 minutes a day, in addition to whenever you start to feel your anxiety begin to spike. Consider the following steps:

   1. Lie down or sit in a chair (you can close your eyes if you want).
   2. Breathe all the way in.
   3. On the exhale, breathe all the way out. Completing inflation/deflation is very important here.
   4. Repeat for roughly 5-10 minutes. Practice deep breathing throughout the day, as much as you can.

2. **Learn to take charge of your own self-worth.** For folks who come from marginalized communities, it can be easy to let the numerous bigoted sociopolitical messages have an effect on how you view your self-worth. And allowing these messages to affect how you see yourself can lead to anxiety. While these messages may not stop, you can take charge of your self-worth by learning to speak to yourself with kindness and dignity.

   Notice feelings of shame — thoughts like “I am bad” — as they come up. Are they coming from the misguided opinions of others who don’t actually know or value you? Value only opinions of those who you value.

   Speak kindly to yourself when you’re feeling down, such as: “I know this hurts right now, but this pain does not define me,” or “My intention is to be kind to myself in these difficult moments.”

   In times of sociopolitical agitation and aggression, being kind to yourself is extremely important — this is especially true if you’re from a historically marginalized social group. Remember, negative talk from others doesn’t define you. You define your self-worth.

3. **Listen with nonreactivity.** We are quite reactive listeners, in that we listen to respond rather than listen to understand. In the age of unchecked bias and echo-chambers on social media, we’re constantly seeking to validate what we already know in order to maintain certainty about the world around us. However, anxiety can spike when we’re met with folks who have different views from our own. So how do we handle these situations? The short answer is practicing nonreactive listening. This can be applied to any situation, in cluding when interacting with folks who have different political or social beliefs than ours.

   Tips: Listen completely and without judgment. See if their logic makes sense. Ask follow-up questions if there are holes in their logic. Listen first and respond second.

4. **Live according to your values.** It’s easy to live according to the values of others in our lives and lose sight of what really matters to you. But being true to your values is important, especially during times of great sociopolitical or environmental stress. Remember: Living according to values is not goal-oriented, but rather doing things that make you feel good. Instead of saying “this is what I should care about,” figure out what you do care about. Upon reflection, you may recognize that you want to spend more free time with family and friends, engage in social action or protesting, engage in political discourse or climate change initiatives.

We live in challenging times, but it doesn’t mean that there aren’t small changes we can make in our lives to help us feel more comfortable with ourselves and our worries about the future.

Source: Healthline
Baked goods can be filled with added sugars and unhealthy fats. Don’t forget though... everything in moderation. Desserts can still be an enjoyable part of a well-balanced diet. Here are some tips for delicious, more nutritious baked good with less added sugar and saturated fat.

- Add a fruit or vegetable. Add shredded or pureed apple, carrot, banana or pumpkin to recipes to boost nutrients, flavor and moisture. These ingredients can also replace some of the butter or oil in the recipe. You can also use unsweetened applesauce instead of oil.
- Use a whole-grain flour. Substitute all-purpose flour for white whole wheat flour. You can also replace ½ of the all-purpose flour for whole grain flour without making major adjustments to the recipe.
- Experiment with less common flours such as almond flour.
- Use avocado in your desserts. Use this healthy fat to make frosting, pudding, or replace butter in recipes for cakes, brownies, bread, or other baked goods.
- Replace oil or fat in the recipe with Greek yogurt. You won’t lose any flavor and will still have plenty of moisture.
- Don’t bake it. Try no-bake energy balls or homemade granola bars. You can add chia seeds or ground flax, oatmeal, a little honey, and a nut butter to a healthier sweet treat.
- Exchange milk chocolate for dark chocolate made with 70% or more cacao. Dark chocolate contains more flavanols which has been shown to lower blood pressure.

There is room for all foods in your healthy eating pattern. Focus on enjoying small portions of your favorite sweet treats and experiment with healthier versions of them.