

8 Morning and Nighttime Rituals Health Pros Swear By



(Getty Images)

Raves for rituals

As a U.S. Army veteran, Chad McDonald is a firm believer in the power of rituals. Whether it's making his bed every morning or stretching for a few minutes each night, "predictability is comforting," says McDonald, founder of SOLACE New York, a CrossFit Studio. It also can be good for you, with [research](#) suggesting rituals can [relieve stress](#), free up head space for tough decisions and even encourage you to savor your food. And of course, healthy actions taken each day can add up to a healthy life more than can major changes with no staying power. "If you can't sustain healthy habits," McDonald says, "then they're really no good anyhow." But where to begin?

Corrected on June 17, 2016: *An earlier version of this story included Dr. Michael Grandner's previous academic title.*

[Sunrise, sunset](#)



(iStockphoto)

Sunrise, sunset

You (hopefully) [brush your teeth](#) each morning and evening – rather than midday and midnight, for instance – for good reason: “Rituals are great to do at sun up and sun down because your body likes cues,” says Susan Albers, a clinical psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic who specializes in eating and body image issues, weight loss and mindfulness. When adopting a new [healthy habit](#), then, tie it to an already established routine – or an “anchor ritual” – like brushing your teeth, Albers suggests. A bonus? “These rituals can help you to sleep better at night and wake up faster in the morning,” she says. Here, Albers and other experts share the health habits they follow *and* recommend to clients:

1. They stretch.



(Getty Images)

1. They stretch.

McDonald spends many of his days in an office and his evenings in a gym. His “nightcap?” A 10- to 20-minute [stretching](#) session guided by [ROMWOD](#), a website geared toward the CrossFit community that aims to increase range of motion and boost [post-workout recovery](#), among other benefits. Not only does stretching decrease your risk of injury and improve your athletic performance since “strength and flexibility produce power,” but it’s also “a huge stress reliever” before hitting the sack, McDonald finds.

2. They move.



(Paul Bradbury/Getty Images)

2. They move.

For Meg Carlough Kudrick, a yoga instructor and co-founder of House of Jai Yoga in New York City, stretching is a morning ritual. “Most, if not all, animals stretch at least a little before they start their days,” she points out. Us humans should take note: Whether by stretching, doing a few pushups or walking to the bus stop, [morning movement](#) is great for the muscles and mind alike, experts say. Plus, it assures you get at least *some* physical activity that day. As Jim White, an exercise physiologist and registered dietitian with studios in Virginia, puts it: “Do the most important things first.”

[3. They hydrate.](#)



(Getty Images)

3. They hydrate.

The moment White's alarm goes off in the morning, he reaches for his bedside 16-ounce bottle of water and chugs the whole thing. "It's just a great jumpstart" to reaching the 64 to 96 ounces of water he aims to drink each day. As for evening hydration, pros reach for soothing drinks like chamomile tea over boozy drinks like wine. Just like a big nighttime meal, White says, alcohol "can put you to sleep, but it can affect your sleep in the night."

[4. They moisturize.](#)



(Getty Images)

4. They moisturize.

If you want to wake up with beautiful skin, go to bed with clean, well-moisturized skin, says Dr. Chris Adigun, a dermatologist in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. "During the night, the skin has a chance to repair itself, the swelling of your extremities goes down and the stretch from that swelling goes away, giving the skin a break," she says, making bedtime the best time to lotion up. Your nighttime rituals can also affect your likelihood of greeting the next day with puffy eyes or a swollen face. To avoid that, try adding a pillow under your head, cutting down on salt in the evenings and covering eyes with cold compresses like cool, caffeinated tea bags, Adigun suggests.

5. They're grateful.



(Getty Images)

5. They're grateful.

Gracing White's bathroom mirror isn't a photo of his dream body, but rather the word "gratitude." Looking at it first thing each morning reminds him to recognize whatever it is he's thankful for that day, "rather than starting off bitter or stressed," he says, as a scroll through emails or a look at the news might do. Such a simple routine is backed by research linking consistent practices of gratitude with everything from a stronger immune system to fewer feelings of isolation to improved body image to [better sleep](#). "The benefits of saying a genuine 'thank you' are a well-hidden secret," Albers says.

[6. They smile.](#)



(iStockphoto)

6. They smile.

While you're looking at that mirror, turn off your critical mind and flash yourself "a little Buddha smile" instead, Albers suggests. Just as with [laughter](#) yoga, which reduces stress, stretches muscles and boosts oxygen flow to muscles, smiling releases feel-good chemicals such as endorphins and serotonin – even if that smile is fake. "This will transform your mood and feelings about yourself," Albers says. Inspired? Go ahead and strike a superhero pose, too – research suggests doing so for just two minutes can boost your confidence. "What a great payoff," Albers says.

[7. They meditate.](#)



(Getty Images)

7. They meditate.

Albers calls it the 5-5-5 plan: Five minutes to relieve your email or social media itch, five minutes to put your phone away and five minutes to [meditate](#). These 15 minutes "move you into wind-down mode," she says. Other health pros also endorse a brief pre-sleep meditation session. White, for one, uses an app called Headspace to guide him, while Kudrik recites a mantra that translates to "I am that." "It helps remind me that all of the busyness of my mind is temporary, and in recognizing that, I can let it go and rest," she says.

[8. They tune out.](#)



(Getty Images)

8. They tune out.

If there's one thing healthy pros *don't* do in the moments sandwiching sleep, it's staring at a smartphone or other screen. Upon rising, natural light wins out since "it's often much brighter than artificial light and is a powerful signal to the brain to wake up," says Dr. Michael Grandner, an assistant professor of psychiatry, psychology and medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, where he directs the Sleep & Health Research Program. At night, even watching TV isn't helpful since it just hits your mind's pause button, rather than its relaxation one, Grandner adds. "The key," he says, "is to not spend too much time awake in bed." If you do, you can rest assured you'll wake up on the wrong side tomorrow.

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