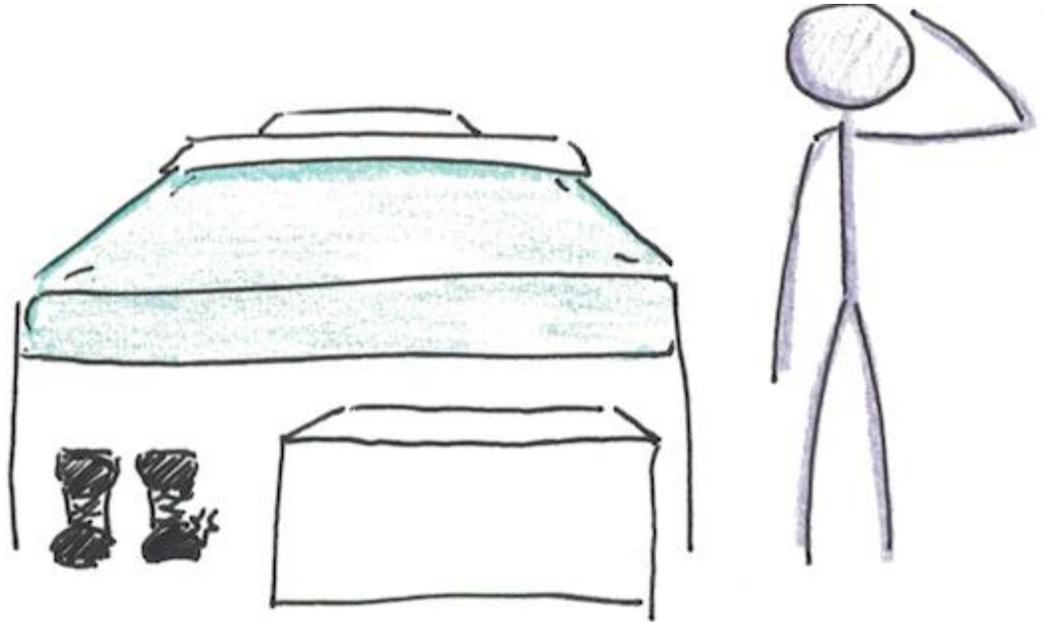


# The Six Morning Routines that Will Make You Happier, Healthier and More Productive

Start your morning off right with these simple but effective routines.

[Scott Young](#)



Of all the different things you can try to improve your productivity, a morning routine is one of the most effective.

There are a few reasons why morning routines are so useful. The first is obvious to anyone who has ever procrastinated, just getting started is often the hardest part. If you can start out with the right momentum towards your goals, you'll avoid wrestling with yourself in the morning to get started.

The second is that the morning, particularly before the workday officially begins, is a quiet time with fewer social obligations. For many of us, the rest of the day can present a chaotic, ever-changing blast of responsibilities, urgent errands and unexpected interruptions. The morning, in contrast, is often the most consistent part of your day.

Morning routines also set the tone for your upcoming day. Do you want your workday to begin quiet and contemplative? With vigorous exercise? Silent meditation? Creative and productive? Your morning habit can push you along a current which will carry throughout the morning and allow you to maximize whatever aspect of your personality you want to be most important.

In this article, I'd like to explore a few different morning routines you can try. But first, let's talk about what comes before the morning ritual: sleep.

## When Should You Wake Up? How Much Sleep Should You Get?



When you talk about productivity, there seems to be two camps. Some argue in favor of waking up extremely early to maximize those early-morning hours. Others say getting enough [sleep needs to be the priority](#). If you can't go to bed by 8pm, you should wake up only after you've gotten 7-8 hours of sleep.

I believe the scientific case is fairly clear: when it comes to productivity, getting enough sleep is essential.

A lack of sleep causes enormous cognitive declines, it [impacts your ability to form memories](#), and may even [increase the risk of certain diseases](#) (including cancer). Research indicates that 7-8 hours per day is a nearly universal requirement, so those who claim to get by on four or six hours per night might be kidding themselves.

Worse, the cognitive impairment of a lack of sleep can accumulate, [even if you think it has leveled off](#). Any morning routine you develop needs to accommodate your sleeping rhythms.

**Key Lesson:** Your morning routine should allow you enough sleep. Pick a time you can wake up consistently and also get 7-8 hours of sleep on a normal night.

# Creating the Perfect Morning Routine

I've experimented with a ton of different morning routines. Waking up super early, waking up without an alarm, exercise, learning, work and many others.

In all these different experiments, I've found that there isn't *one* perfect routine that will make you rich, ripped and happy overnight. Instead, there's different routines for different purposes, and so I tend to think about my routines as trying to match my most important goals of that moment.

If I'm really focusing on health and fitness, starting with exercise or putting in the time to eat a healthy breakfast might go first. If I'm working like crazy, getting straight to work on my most important tasks may be better than cluttering up my morning with different tasks. Different goals, different routines.

Therefore, instead of suggesting one routine, I want to suggest six. These different routines have all served me during different parts of my life, and so you can see which feels like the best fit for you.

## The Six Key Morning Routines

### 1. Exercise and Energy



This routine is simple: right when you wake up you go and exercise. Before eating breakfast, checking your phone and emails or watching some television—go out and move.

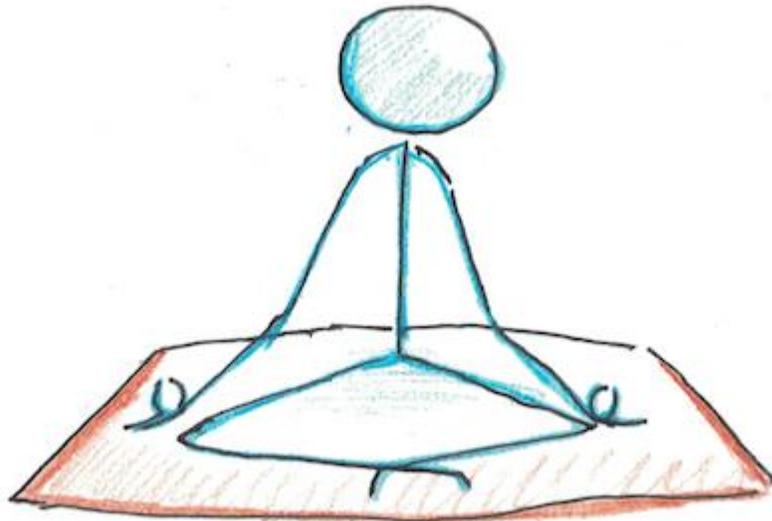
I've done this before with running, swimming and even just push-ups.

The first benefit of this is that it puts fitness in that all-important first slot of the day. If you've struggled with staying on a regular exercise schedule in the past, this can be a good way to make sure it is a priority.

Second, this habit can wake you up. Exercise can keep you alert and mentally functioning at your prime, when a coffee may only be able to slightly prolong your later-day crash.

**Recommended for:** If you struggle with grogginess, you've had a hard time fitting exercise into your schedule and if you want to make fitness your top priority.

## 2. Meditation and Stillness



Contrary to the first one, this starts with daily meditation. I've done this before with 30-minute meditation periods.

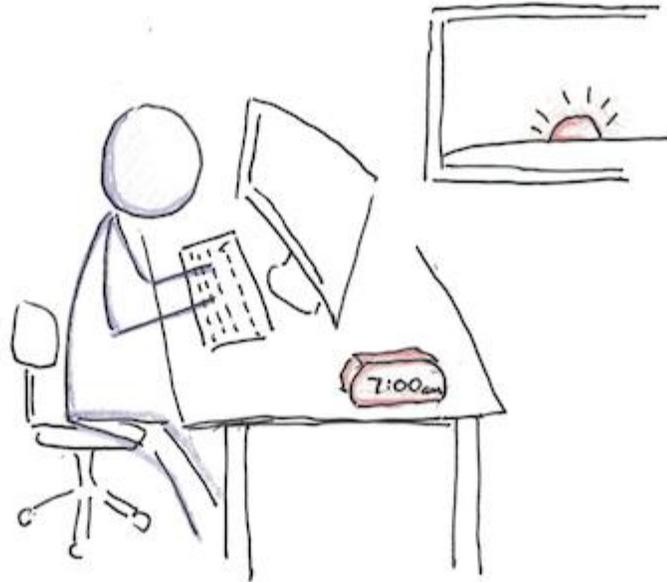
It's important to do seated meditation and not do so lying down in your bed, or you'll be likely to fall back asleep. I sit on the floor, not a chair, which is not terribly uncomfortable, but also a position that requires enough muscle tension that I'm unlikely to fall asleep.

I've found this helpful because it tends to leave me calm and focused. Useful if you expect to have stressful days ahead to start yourself off with a quiet mind.

I also find that one of the challenges of grogginess is keeping your eyes open. Meditation allows your mind to wake up without strain so by the time you hear the final gong you're fully awake.

**Recommended for:** If you want to be calm and less anxious in your day, if you've wanted to make meditation a priority but haven't had time, as an alternative if you don't like exercise first thing in the morning.

### 3. Get to Work!



The key to productivity is just doing the work. This routine underscores this by making getting some work done your first priority, so that your first break is the chance to eat breakfast, shower, shave and do the normal routine you'd do in the morning.

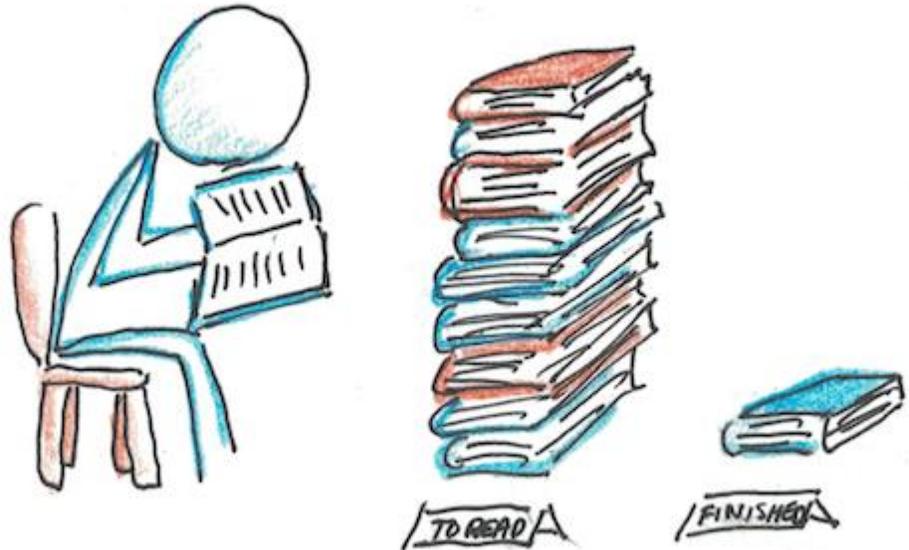
I did this during the MIT Challenge. I even have old schedules I wrote on paper which had "6:55 – Wake Up," "7:00 – Start studying," written on them. I'd wake up, and in five minutes I'd be doing practice questions, listening to the next lecture or working on a programming assignment. Only after I did 30-60 minutes of this would I take a break to "get ready" to start my day.

This works because it not only maximizes your time, it shifts your productivity much earlier. You finish much earlier in the day and can enjoy a less cluttered evening without guilt that you're slacking.

The second benefit is that you get to take a break when you need it. Too many people take their break *before* starting, so that when they have to work they can't take a pause for fear of not having enough time to finish.

**Recommended for:** If you have important goals and projects that take a lot of time. If you expect to be working a lot and you're worried you won't have time to do everything.

## 4. Learning First



When I was planning my year-long trip to learn four different languages, the early morning was the only time my roommate (who went with me on the trip) and I had to do some pre-travel practice. ~~SEP~~ Therefore, we woke up at 6am each day and did a half-hour of Pimsleur lessons before he got ready to go to work and I got up to start my day.

In other times I've done learning goals where I've read books, watched lectures, practiced skills or studied first thing. This is often useful for the same reason it's useful for meditation and exercise: it puts something you struggle to schedule first thing in your day, so you won't forget it.

**Recommended for:** When you want to work on an important learning goal but never find time.

## 5. Plan Your Day



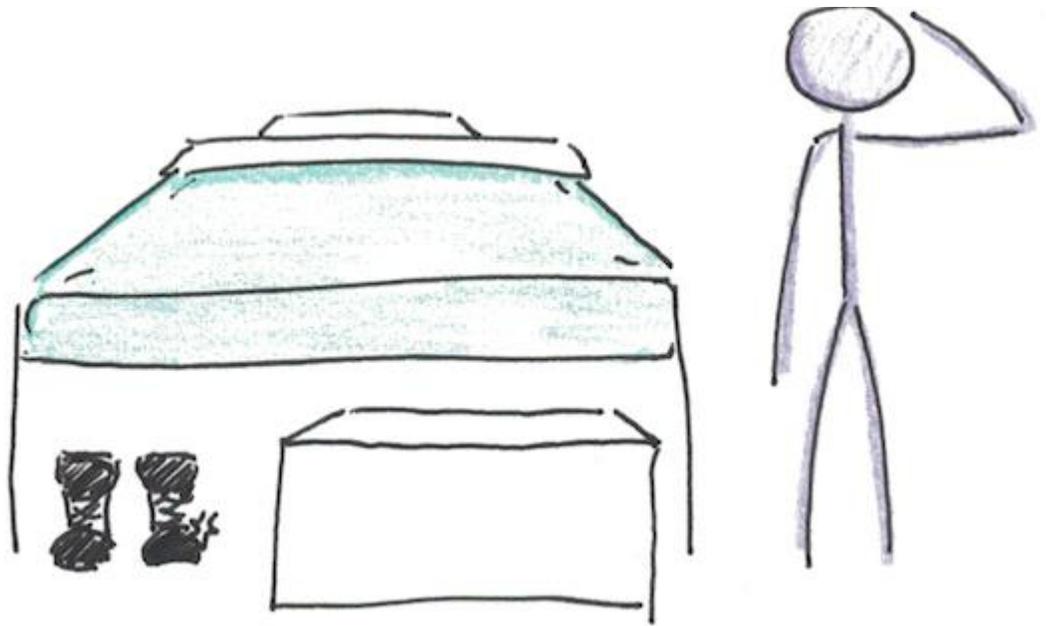
Mental rehearsal is a key strategy elite athletes use to ensure performance. By imagining each movement vividly, they can perform better under pressure when the big event comes.

You can exploit a similar impact by planning out your day in the morning. Don't just jot down some to-do items, but actually imagine working on them. What will be the complications? Where will you have gaps in your schedule that need filling? What will you need to focus on?

Doing this planning first thing in the morning can be a good way to prime your day for success.

**Recommended for:** If you have a hectic, busy schedule. If you want to focus your mind on work and productivity, but can't start working right away.

## 6. Make Your Bed



Making your bed, brushing your teeth, showering, shaving, doing makeup, pressing your clothes and more are all little tasks that can put you in good form for the rest of your day. Such morning routines were pretty much expected a generation or two ago, but nowadays many people skip out on some of these steps as the culture has become looser.

An advantage of this more traditional routine is that in putting your house and appearance in order, you put your mind in order as well. As one admiral William H. McRaven [put it](#), “if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made — that you made — and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.”

This approach can be taken on its own, or it can be synced up with one of the other two—say fifteen minutes for some key preparation activities followed by exercise, work or study.

**Recommended for:** Creating a sense of order and dignity in your day. Giving you a foundation of meticulousness and conscientiousness to approach your later tasks.

## Add an Evening Routine

Morning routines are great for managing the first part of your day, but they also depend crucially on an evening routine to complement them. If you do decide to aim for an early rising schedule, you need an early-to-sleep routine to match it. Similarly, if you plan to work or learn first thing in the morning, you should plan out your day the night before so you know what to work on.



A good evening routine should minimize blue light (a good rule is to have no screens after 9pm), so that the melatonin circuit that controls your circadian rhythm can start to adjust for better sleep.

I often like to plan out my day ahead of time and either read a book or listen to an audiobook with the lights out for 20-30 minutes before sleeping to make it easier to doze off.

Matched to your goals a good routine is the foundation for success. It can help you become more productive, healthier and happier by tweaking at one of the most consistent and important points in the day.

This article was originally published on March 12, 2019, by Scott Young,