

# THE MORNING ROUTINE

**4 Simple Upgrades  
for an Amazing Start  
to Your Day**

ULTRAWELLNESSPROGRAM



## **INTRODUCTION**

So much rage at the present—similar to desiring the svelte look—is on crafting the perfect morning routine.

I am not one to tilt my chin up to this obsession, however. I too am an advocate for daily rituals; especially in the first three hours of my day. If I don't heave myself into my current flavor of routine, scruples circle me in like a pack of wolves.

When the morning routine is operating like a well-oiled machine, life is good. For knowledge workers, it's a quiet celebration. But what about when we wake up late? Or when we feel like we're in a fog and can't crank the creativity? What if we sit down to do our work and simply can't bring ourselves to do what we know we should do?

Fortunately, there's a way to combat a slow start in the mornings. It turns out our ability to be productive heavily depends on something called the completion bias.

Research shows that we are designed to work for completion. In other words, we like to cross things off, or mark them as "done." The reason why we repeat this behavior is that anytime we recognize we've completed something, the brain releases dopamine. This is the neurotransmitter responsible for making us feel energized and motivated—and consequentially influences us to seek out another similar experience.

Researchers of the completion bias suggest that we can leverage this scenario when we have a slow start to our mornings. They found that when workers started their day with banal tasks—but items that could be checked off as “done”—the workers performed better on long-term, complex projects afterward:

*“Your brain releases dopamine when you achieve goals. And since dopamine improves attention, memory, and motivation, even achieving a small goal can result in a positive feedback loop that makes you more motivated to work harder going forward.”*

When the wheels aren’t turning on demanding tasks, we can revert to engaging in small, quick assignments with immediate reward to kickstart productivity momentum. Think of this like jumping into a cold lake. If you can’t stomach the nose dive, you’ll ease into the water by going feet first, then waist deep, then eventually, all the way in. It’s a habituation phase.

Similarly, doing easy-to-finish jobs before complex tasks help us feel more motivated and “warmed-up” to tackle more challenging projects with productivity momentum at our backs.

Before we go any further, I’d like to say two things: The morning routine is wonderfully personal and by no means am I reducing you to a list; these are simply suggestions to try. Secondly, this isn’t about addition; it’s ultimately about subtracting the unessential.

Treat this offering like a buffet; take what works for you and leave the rest. Here are nine ways to build momentum in the mornings to combat a slow start.

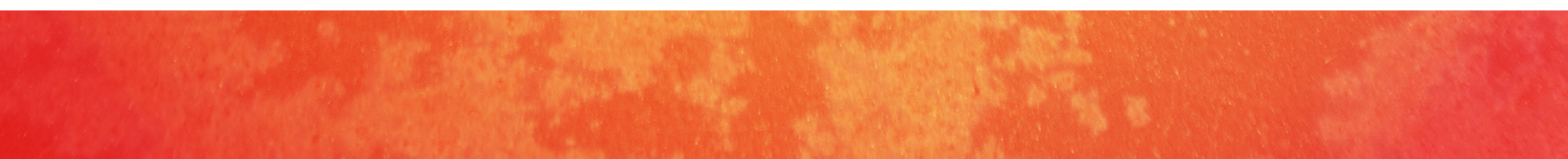




## **1. GET DRESSED.**

Remote work is steadily becoming less of a foreign affair every year. This means that more of us are working from home. Since the traffic from the bedroom to the home office is so light, it's tempting to fire up the laptop in sweats and the crusty t-shirt.

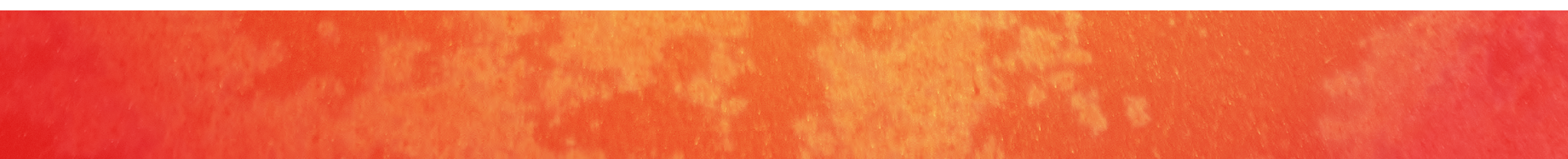
Given the landscape of creative work these days, both divergent and convergent thinking is needed. Interestingly, the way we dress may impact our thinking more deeply than we think.



Research suggests that subjects who dressed up engaged in higher levels of abstract thinking than those who dressed casually. Here's what Michael Slipian, a postdoctoral research scholar and adjunct assistant professor at Columbia Business School, says about attire:

*“When you need to think creatively, about the bigger picture, that's when dressing formally will increase your productivity.”*

Even though the sweats and the crusty t-shirt are convenient, it might be worth the effort to shower, dress up and act like you're going to the office. Apparently, a portion of our creativity depends on how we dress.







## **2. PROTEIN + FAT FOR BREAKFAST**

When it comes to emotional labor and knowledge work, cognitive function is important. Neglecting to nurture our brains with proper food yields mental performance akin to an eight cylinder car running on four cylinders.

Traditional breakfast foods offer cereals, pastries, high-sugar fruit juices, and bagels. While there are healthy alternatives to these foods, switching the make-up of our breakfast food altogether is worth considering. Here's why:

Foods high in carbohydrates trigger a high release of insulin which sweeps amino acid levels from our blood leaving tryptophan to cross the blood-brain barrier easily. Tryptophan is the precursor to serotonin which is the neurotransmitter responsible for making us feel calm, relaxed and enables restful sleep.



This state—calm, relaxed and perhaps sleepy—is not how we want to show up to our work. We want to feel energized, alert and motivated. Therefore, pivoting our breakfast foods that support that mental state is a possible solution.

To do this, we must shift from carbohydrate dense foods to foods that are dense in protein and fat. The reason being is that protein foods stimulate the production of dopamine (the neurotransmitter responsible for sharp mental cognition, motivation, and pleasure) and fat plays a critical role in the production of acetylcholine (the neurotransmitter responsible for learning and mental sharpness).

This combination of protein and fat for our first meal provides a slow and steady rise in blood sugar. The fat assists in keeping those blood levels stable for an extended period. Furthermore, this food pairing is like a superhuman cocktail for the creative worker. Drive and motivation are supported by the protein foods, and mental sharpness is augmented with foods from healthy fats.



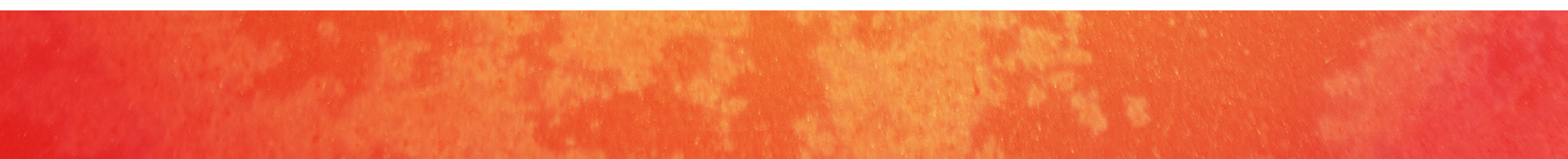


### 3. **MAKE TEA**

In the age of distraction, it can feel like trying to break iron with our bare hands when we try to do one thing at a time. When we got frazzled and pulled every which way, stepping away for a minute to “waste” time can slow us down and help us re-focus.

Making a bowl of matcha—the Japanese powdered green tea used in traditional ceremonies—is one way to slow down to regain focus intentionally.

The act must be as archaic as you can make it. Heat some water in a kettle. Scoop two teaspoons of matcha into a bowl. Fill the bowl halfway with water. Take a bamboo whisk and whip until there is a light foam that rises to the top. Sip and enjoy.





There's no need to be a tea expert. Rather, the process should be used as a tool to simply slow down and focus on one thing: Making tea. The idea is that the mindset will be transferred to your next task.

In addition to reeling focus back in, drinking green tea also has some performance benefits. First, green tea contains caffeine in sensible doses. This is the first productivity boost. Caffeine will block an inhibitory neurotransmitter called Adenosine. This increases the firing of neurons and concentration. Secondly, green tea also packs a healthy measure of L-theanine. This increases the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA which has anti-anxiety effects.

This one-two punch of caffeine and L-theanine is a powerhouse combo for the creative worker and can jumpstart a slow morning.





## **4. MEDITATE**

Who has time to do nothing these days? That’s usually the posture towards meditation. While the research is showing that meditation brings with it a laundry list of benefits—lower stress, better ability to cope with difficult situations, improved empathy, and boosted immune function to name a few—you may still not have been sold on the idea.

If you’re looking for a justifiable reason to spend 10–20 minutes of “doing nothing,” consider this: Meditation makes you more productive.

Meditation is an on-going practice of managing our urges. With a continual application, our meditation exercise increases our capacity to resist the knee-jerk desires.



This skill can be carried over to our productivity. When we increase our ability to resist urges, we can stay focused longer, which means we can get more done in less time.

Headspace.com is like a personal trainer for your brain. They've made it simple to start your practice, and all it takes is 10 minutes a day. Done in the morning, a simple meditation is a simple way to get the wheels turning on our creative work.



## **END NOTES**

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