

Got Five Minutes? Change Your Life



How does your day begin? Do stressful thoughts and worries fill your head? Does the way you think about them add to your anxiety about what lies ahead? Would you like to find a different way to start the day?

“It’s easy to fall into habits of thinking that increase stress, but by doing a five-minute exercise that promotes peace, contentment, and purpose, your way of thinking and your day can be more calm and balanced,” says Jeffrey Brantley, M.D., director of the mindfulness-based stress-reduction program at Duke University’s Center for Integrative Medicine and author of *Five Good Minutes*.

The concept is simple: Every morning take five minutes to apply attention, intention, and wholeheartedness to a helpful activity.

Get ready

Begin by doing the following before each exercise.

Breathe mindfully for about a minute. To do so, allow your body to breathe naturally while you pay attention to

your breath moving in and out. Don’t try to control your breathing or thoughts.

“Paying attention to your breathing helps you be more aware of the present moment instead of regretting the past or worrying about some future event,” says Dr. Brantley.

Set your intention, as a way of pointing yourself toward a goal or value that’s important to you. As far as the exercises are concerned, your intention could be to become more peaceful, content, or joyous.

Take five

When you’re ready, pick one of the following exercises and do it wholeheartedly, with all your attention and energy.

- Have a silent retreat. Take five minutes to quiet your mind by finding a quiet place where you can notice your breathing in silence as you let go of any urgency to be somewhere else. Return to this place of stillness if a stressful situation arises later in the day.

- Record your joys. Take five minutes to make a list of the experiences and events that bring you joy, listening to music, spending time with your family, doing something for someone, talking with a friend, or playing with your pet. “By taking note of the little joys in your life, you open yourself to more happiness,” says Dr. Brantley.
- Melt that frown. Don’t let a frown shadow your day. It’s hard to be angry or sad with a smile on your face. Take five minutes and smile while you wash the dishes or do some other chore.
- Look for the extraordinary in the ordinary. This exercise is about finding the miraculous in daily life and searching for the unique in the mundane. Take five minutes to observe the less noticeable things in your morning, such as the sound of birds chirping outside your window, the wind rustling in the trees, or the smile on a baby’s face.
- Give up grumpy mornings. Make a list of all the good things that happened to you in the past week.
- Fuel your optimism. Start your morning by coming up with as many hopeful thoughts for yourself, your loved ones, and the planet as you can. For example: I have hope that everything goes smoothly at work today. I have hope that my family is healthy and happy. I have hope that my friends are having good experiences today. I have hope the world will be peaceful today.
- Explore the mystery of being human. Ask yourself the following questions, or ones that come to mind, and listen for whatever answers arise. What would it be like to love my spouse/partner/family more generously? What if I didn’t always have to be right? What would it be like to be flowing with life, not against it?

“So much of our stress and unhappiness come from feelings of fear, separation, and judgment,” says Dr. Brantley. “These exercises invite you to shift your patterns of thinking to embrace joy and acceptance.”

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