



FINER THINGS

The Productive Woman
Efficiently tackle your day.

We all want to be productive.

Whether you're in your career stride or pursuing a passion project, it's rewarding to feel like you've accomplished something each day.

At the same time, there's an intense pressure to do *enough*. We're surrounded by stimuli showing us another project, task, or skill we should be on top of.

It can be overwhelming to find true productivity in a flood of inspirational messaging.

That productivity is essential to maximize the time you set aside for work while leaving your precious free time truly free and to make efficient progress towards your goals.

However, productivity is **not** about maximizing the ticks on your to-do list.

Instead, **productivity is about doing the right things effectively.**

What exactly works for you will be unique, but there are decades of research on habits and methods to be productive. Lucky for you, we've done the reading already. We've cut through the noise to share only the tips most likely to help you efficiently tackle your day *every day*.

We've compiled all the perspectives together, so you can learn how to use the time you have more effectively with the right time management, overall habits, and daily routine to find true productivity.



Time Management

Prioritization

You can't do it all. By properly prioritizing your tasks, you'll complete what's needed first (producing more value in the same time). Trim the fat off your to-do list. To be more productive, you have to actually do less.

- Organize tasks by importance and due date to determine what needs to be done each day.
- Focus on three main tasks each day.
- Create each day's to-do list the day before so you don't spend time each morning determining what needs to be done.
- Ignore false urgency. Importance (or team members) can inflate the supposed urgency of a task or project, but just because something is important doesn't mean it's urgent.

Scheduling

A core part of time management is scheduling itself. Schedules are hugely personal, but here are universal tips.

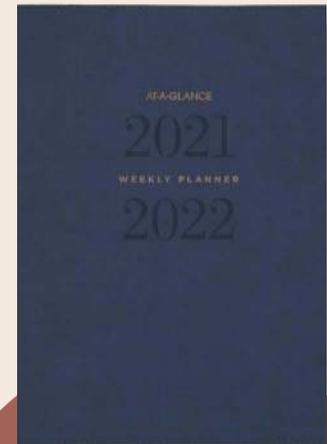
Embrace your natural schedule.

Don't force yourself to be an early-riser if you're not naturally. Create a schedule that builds around your productivity peaks.

Standard peaks are mid-late morning after waking up (until 1PM) and later afternoon between 5PM and 6PM. Typically, brain-heavy tasks are best for the morning; physical tasks are best for the afternoon.

Limit meeting time.

Effective meetings should be structured with an agenda ahead of time and an end-of-meeting review of responsibilities. No meeting needs more than 90 minutes.



Find a style of planner that works for you. We're fans of At-A-Glance for simple, organized structure with space for handwriting.

Schedule one to two slots of free time each day.

That way, you can handle an afternoon headache, urgent problem solving session, or underestimate a project without breaking the whole schedule.

Consider non-traditional work hours.

We typically think of the standard 9-5 work hours, even when we're in charge.

However, other schedules have shown to be more effective. For some people, a compressed schedule (working more hours per day for less days a week) maximizes free-time without impacting them on work days.

However, avoid working overnight. Night shift employees see an increased risk of heart disease as high as 15% to 18% higher than others.

Work less.

The average person is productive for two hours and 53 minutes daily. That is, in a traditional setting, most people spend five hours (of their total eight) doing things other than work. What's the point of that?

Plus, being in the office for more than eight hours a day is associated with poorer overall health and a 40% increase in risk for heart disease and other stress-related diseases. So, it's best to minimize working hours while maximizing efficiency.

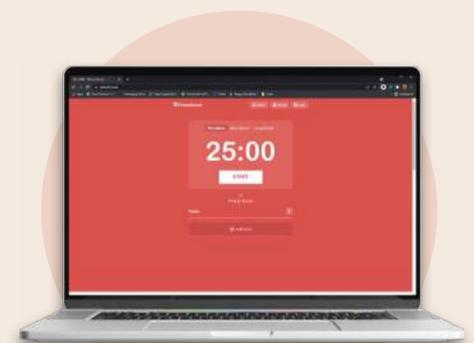
So, work less and take more breaks. Work should be hugely segmented with frequent breaks. Our maximum ability to focus without a break is between 52 and 90 minutes, but there's no benefit to pushing it.

Try the Pomodoro Method

Use the Pomodoro method for consistent breaks throughout the day. Named "Pomodoro" after the inventor's use of an Italian kitchen timer shaped like a tomato ("pomodoro" being Italian for "tomato"), this method is simple to follow.

Time is chunked into segments.

- For 25 minutes, you work uninterrupted and unpausing with a timer counting down.
- At the end of this segment, you take a five minute break.
- Then, you begin again.
- Every four repetitions, you take a longer, 15 minute break.



Use the website *Pomofocus* for a browser-enabled timer.

This method shifts your focus from “Complete task” which is overwhelming and large to “Work for 25 minutes” which is simpler and manageable.

The forced breaks interrupt work and allow for a digestion period for the brain. These breaks can be used to maintain self-care throughout the day.

- Stand up and stretch.
- Refill water.
- Look away from screens and observe distant landscapes.
- Practice mindful, deep breathing exercises.
- Dance it out to a song at full blast.
- Make a cup of tea.
- Step outside and get some sun on your face.

These breaks shouldn’t be used to pivot to other work or to mentally wrestle with your current task. They are a disconnect.

The longer 15-minute break should be treated the same, but with more potential breaks. You could tidy up the desk from the day’s work, prepare a snack, do a yoga flow, take a walk, or anything else that doesn’t demand mental work, but provides space for your mind to digest.

Mastering the Pomodoro Method

This method can take some practice. Distractions are inevitable, so here are tips for embracing this method.

→ Traditionally, this method relies on a visible time-keeper so you can see time passing. For a cute, decor-approved timer, we love this **mod-style one** that comes in four colors.

→ When you think up interrupting tasks during a current pomodoro, note it in a dedicated to-do list separate from today’s pre-planned schedule. Once written down, it’s no longer your responsibility right now. You can re-visit it later.

For example, if thinking up household tasks is often interrupting work, build a list of upcoming household needs into your to-do list

TIP If maintaining a warm cuppa is one of your main distractions, invest in the **Ember temperature-control mug** for freshly brewed warmth always.



→ Communicate clear boundaries with coworkers, family, or friends. Practice saying, “I’m in the middle of a task. I can speak in an hour.” Then, address them during your next long break.

For coworkers in particular, consider keeping a public calendar with publically scheduleable slots once or twice a day (depending on how interactive your role is) and asking everyone to schedule you that way.

→ Identify what often distracts you and implement tactics to pre-emptively remove those distractions.

For example, if thinking up household tasks is often interrupting work, build a list of upcoming household needs into your to-do list brainstorming during schedule.

Additional Challenge of Working from Home

Time management is a challenge even in a traditional workplace, but those challenges are multiplied when you’re working in a home setting. When work tasks overlap with household chores and family management, it can feel harder to create a productive environment for work.

However, when done well, working from home is actually more productive than an office setting. Recent data from 2021 (when a massive majority shifted to work from home) productivity increased by 47%. Beyond the working hours themselves, working from home cuts out massive time demands like commutes. This time can be re-allocated to hobbies, exercise, or other self-care activities that will better your work performance too.

The key to these benefits is to maximize efficiency during working hours.

Create a distinction between work and personal life when they share the same footprint. Here are some common strategies.

→ Determine a clear work schedule customized to you.

→ Create a separate work space or home office.

→ Relocate activities out of the home.

Beyond these structural elements, consider other habits to solve common problems with blurred lines between household tasks and work tasks.

→ Hire additional support for household tasks like cleaning to reallocate labor.

→ Utilize time-saving products like meal-delivery or equipment to save time.

With increasingly clever technology for the home, you can simplify daily tasks. Save time cleaning up pet hair with a voice-activated **Roomba robot vacuum** or cooking dinner with an **Instant Pot** for faster cook times.

Limiting Email Overload

Prioritization will mean nothing if you sink hours of the day into emails in between your core tasks. The average worker spends 28% of their workweek managing email! What a waste of time! Plus, emails contribute to psychosomatic stress complaints and lower job satisfaction, so for real productivity, you need to manage emails systematically.

Contain Email within Set Times

Schedule time to check your email and outside of those time blocks do not check it. Close the window and mute notifications so you can get the real work done.

TIP If you're a Gmail user, install the Chrome extension [Pause Gmail](#) to pause your email alerts for a set time period.

When you're creating those scheduled blocks, adjust the frequency to your needs.

Some people schedule an email check every two hours (allowing them to chunk two hours of uninterrupted work between each). Others check email at three set times (morning, midday, and end of day) or as little as once a day.

Avoid setting an email check-in as your first task of the day. Remember how morning has a mental peak? Don't waste your optimal brain power on emails.

→ If you don't check them, you won't have any nagging distractions when you complete your first task of the day. Sneak in one or more hours of morning productivity (or self-care) before you open the flood gates.

→ Work produced by emails is reactive, rather than proactive. Opening an email inevitably leads to another task in response that isn't within your priority list yet. This leads to doing low-priority tasks ahead of your real focus.

→ Routinely checking email right away trains your coworkers, peers, or other collaborators that your response time is that fast. Then, if you ever do want or need to focus in, they're expecting a faster reply and your reasonable, scheduled response will feel slow.

Try slowing down and seeing your email as what it really is: just a fancy, dressed-up, high-tech version of regular old mail.

-Jake Knapp and John Zeratsky
former Google employees now "recovering email addicts"

Manage Emails Properly

When you are checking emails, do so with intention and organization.

- Schedule an amount of time for email.
- Set up filters or use separate email addresses so low-priority emails don't mix in with your other emails.

If you're not sure how to do that, have one email address for sales and promotions that you give to businesses for coupons, one email for recreational emails like newsletters you enjoy reading, and one email for communication. You could add a distinction between a personal email and a professional email if you often email with friends and family too.

This way your promotional email can be ignored unless you're searching for a specific coupon, your recreational email can be read with a cup of coffee on a Sunday morning, and your communications email is kept clutter-free for workdays.

- Use emails as a schedule-builder not a to-do list. When someone sends a request or a task that requires work, the only response should be to schedule that work for later not letting a new task take over today's work. When you schedule that work, clearly define the necessary task to save yourself from re:reading the email itself to surmise the task.

Format Emails Effectively (and Train Others)

To further cut down on email time, start writing better emails. It's easy to write an email, so oftentimes we ramble on with everything we could possibly say including pleasantries and passive aggression galore (depending on the day).

Instead, write emails like focused memos.

- Write clear, concise subject lines. Consider implementing some standard action-oriented prefixes or pre-phrases that are very intuitive or previously discussed within your team.
 - ACTION REQUIRED (ACT): A check-in or action item that's a part of a larger project and is waiting on the recipient's follow-up.
 - QUESTION (Q): A query that requires no action on the recipient's part.
 - UPDATE (FYI): An update on an ongoing project that doesn't require a response, but may be helpful for the recipient to reference.
 - ASSIGNMENT (TO DO): A new work assignment that needs to be done, but isn't part of an ongoing project.



→ If emails have specific deadlines or datelines, include that date in the subject line.

→ Use clear, verb-focused language about what's needed in the subject line. Using a verb clarifies your expectations for the recipient's action and removes ambiguity.

For example, instead of writing this email subject.

"Web site review"

Write it like this:

ACTION REQUIRED: Review My Comments on Site (DUE 10/3)

This way, the recipient doesn't need to open the email to know what's inside (or to check the timeline). That allows them to skip that email until it's proper place in their schedule.

→ Write concise emails. A clear subject line won't help if the body of the email is a mess. Keep emails concise. For longer commentary, consider attaching a document that's more easily read, commented on, and organized than the plain text of an email body.

If you do need to tackle complex items in an email, break items up with headers and include a recap of what's needed in response to the email at the close of the note so it's clear what's needed in response.

Habits

Beyond specific techniques for how you approach your work, there are some habits that increase productivity specifically or are common in successful individuals.

Prioritize self-care.

Stress leads to reduced productivity. Beyond that, your best self will do your best work. That means properly investing in yourself. Your work output must come second to your self-care.

Part of that is leaving work at work even when your "work" is a personal, passion project. Create clear definitions between recreation, relaxation, and work.

When addressing self-care, you have to look at the full picture of your needs. Your self-care cannot be one dimensional. That is, it can't be all working out and eating healthy if you're not also calling friends and scheduling outings. Be diverse with your self-care activities across all five types: emotional, practical, physical, mental, and social.



Pursue work (or projects) you enjoy.

Satisfaction leads to increased productivity. In fact, quality work is more affected by personal satisfaction than work load so even a heavier load will feel easier if you enjoy (and are passionate) about.

If you're currently unsatisfied with your working conditions (for whatever reason), be active in solving them. If you have a supervisor, meet with them rapidly to discuss why you're unhappy. Your productivity is not the only thing impacted by poor work satisfaction but your whole life.

Set goals.

Often associated with productive people, goal-setting allows you to frame your tasks lists and schedules against what you want to do. Long-term goals broken into segments guide your daily, weekly, and monthly priorities.

To take goal-setting a step further, practice "mental contrasting," which is identifying common roadblocks to your goals and setting tasks for solving those too.

Exercise regularly.

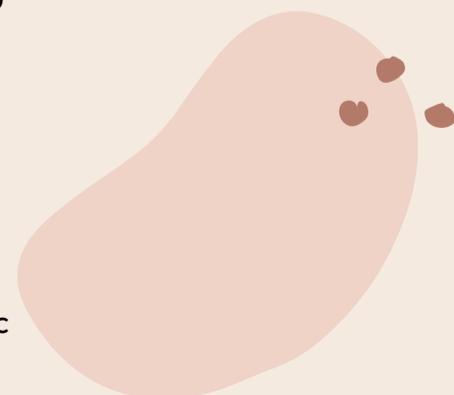
Working out is associated with stress management and mental and physical health. In a large 3500-person study, even one hour of exercise a week decreased their bodily pain in the neck, low back, and forearms as related to their work, cardiovascular health increased (as you'd expect), and productivity at their work increased by 8%.

While other studies do not agree that exercise directly increases productivity, exercise does improve physical and mental health which can, in turn, decrease factors that would disrupt productivity.

Dress in a way that boosts self-confidence.

Self-confidence is associated with embracing opportunities, motivating others, and increased effort. Especially for female managers, self-confidence was cited as a success factor. So, embrace things that boost your self-confidence whether that's spending time on your hair, doing your makeup, or wearing that power blazer.

If you don't have a power blazer already, we love [Veronica Beard's Dickey Jacket](#). With changeable dickeys, one jacket can fit half a dozen different looks. Their classic shape is available in three colors and sizes 00 to 24.



Routine

Routines, once in place, let us run on auto-pilot through our tasks to start our day. Removing the mental effort of decisions in the morning leaves our brain freshly rested for our actual work. They conserve energy while enabling us to do the tasks that prepare us for the day. If you don't already have a set routine, create one.

Your routine, really, is just habits linked together in an ordered sequence.

Once in place, protect it. When routines are disrupted, we're off kilter.

Something as simple as missing a normal morning cup of coffee led to participants in a 400-person study arriving to work less calm and more mentally exhausted (even factoring in their lack of a caffeine boost).

Other studies proved that any interruption to routine whether waking up late, missing breakfast, or disrupted commutes caused the same ripple effect impacting productivity.

To maintain your highest productivity, find an activity to anchor your morning around. Wake up at a consistent time and do something in the morning for yourself.

When your routine is disrupted, try to get it back on track by following the rest of your routine as normal. So, if you wake up late, don't cut out your morning walk to compensate or you'll amplify the impact of the first deviation from routine.

What should be in that routine?

Ultimately, you have to make your own routine. While routines are powerful, there isn't one routine for everyone.

Create a routine with the behaviors you need to be your best or things that cause distress or time waste in the morning.

For example to save mental effort on decisions, plan outfits or meals the night before. The common habits of productive people can be a starting place, but customize to yourself.

→ If you find waking up when you want hard, schedule a time period outside in the sunshine. Sun exposure can help with feeling awake (and adjusting your circadian rhythm to the schedule you want). [Philips SmartSleep Wake-Up Lamp](#) can emulate sun for an easier transition to wakefulness if it's hard to get outside.

→ If you experience physical discomfort or stiffness from desk work, schedule stretches prior to sitting down that prep you for sitting or computer-work. Try wrist and finger stretches to soften the impact of computer work. For a video tutorial on stretching our your fingers, hands, and wrists, follow dedicated [this yoga flow](#) by Yoga With Adrienne.

A solid routine fosters a well-worn groove for one's mental energies and helps stave off the tyranny of moods.

→ If you often forget to eat throughout the day, schedule a prep session where you portion out snacks throughout the day. The Oxo Good Grips Prep & Go collection has a variety of containers for a matching set specialized for all your snacks: vegetables with dip, fresh fruit, or pre-portioned crackers alike.

To save you the time on coming up with snacks, we've done the work! Use our [supplemental mini guide for over 100 Workday Snacks](#) included in this guide.

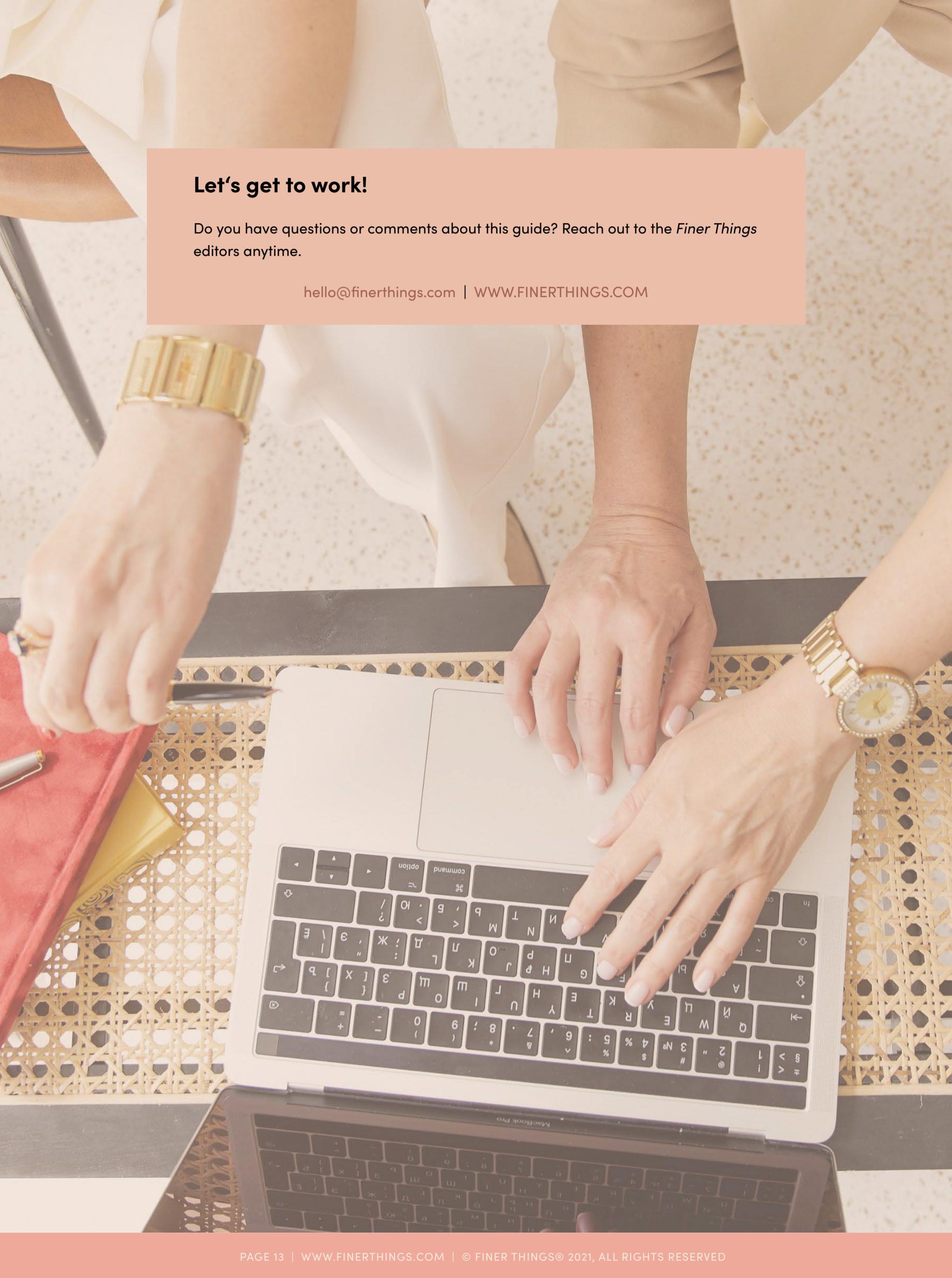


→ If you struggle to connect with your family or friends at the end of the day, connect with them when your focus is best: morning. Have breakfast with your partner or a morning coffee chat with a different friend each day to prioritize a dose of social interaction.

Use these examples to think about what you need (or what's a barrier to your best work) and create a solution in your routine.

If you're building a routine from scratch, start with one behavior and then link new habits together. It's easier to learn a new habit if it's related to another. So, if you're trying to workout every day, do so immediately after brushing your teeth (since you already do that on auto-pilot).

Now, get a headstart on tomorrow with [our headstart worksheet](#).



Let's get to work!

Do you have questions or comments about this guide? Reach out to the *Finer Things* editors anytime.

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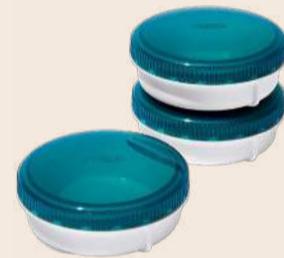
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To easily shop all our favorites in one spot, visit [our Favorites page](#).

For Your Office



For Your Kitchen



For Your Closet



Dickeys pair with the Veronica Beard jacket to customize your look.

For Your Home



Over 100 Healthy Workday Snacks

Pre-preparing snacks for your workday can simplify your breaks so you can spend time enjoying your food rather than rushing to eat something easy (or not eating at all). To save you time and mental effort (from decision making) we've compiled over 100 options for snacks depending on the time you have to invest.

Snacks You Buy

For the quickest prep time, pre-buy snacks and then portion them into single-serving portions to grab and go using our favorite Oxo containers.

David's Roasted, Salted Pumpkin Seeds

A protein-rich snack, pumpkin seeds are a fun variation from the nuts we think of more often for snacks.

Bada Bean Bada Boom's Roasted Fava Beans

Coming in three different flavors, these roasted beans have a generous amount of protein with minimal sugar for a filling snack.

The Good Bean's Crunchy Chickpeas

With a few flavor variations, roasted chickpeas provide protein for a filling snack without too much sugar or fat content.

Brookside's Dark Chocolate Fruit

A perfect pick-me-up for that late afternoon slump, these dark chocolate-covered berries are sweetly satisfying.

Coconut Chips

Crunchy and a little addicting, coconut chips aren't as "healthy" as you might expect, but they are delicious. Use them as a topping rather than a snack if you'd like to limit your portion.

Cottage Cheese

Whether classic whole milk or lightened skim with topping or not, cottage cheese is high in protein and filling for a midday pick me up.

Yogurt

Similar to cottage cheese, yogurt is high in protein and customizable to the calorie content and flavors you'd like.

Dried Fruit

For a bit of sweetness, dried fruit can be a good snack, but it's the same sugar content as fresh fruit so decide which way is more enjoyable for you.

Whatever You Like

When you're searching for store-bought snacks, remember that everything is being marketed to you. Some packages will scream "Healthy!" but nothing is black and white. Ultimately, buy the snacks you enjoy and portion them appropriately. No one snack is the end all by all for healthy (or healthy-ish) snacking.

Snacks You Prep

If you can spare a bit longer, prep snacks that use more fresh ingredients (especially vegetables) for a healthier option.

Save time on grocery shopping with Amazon's Whole Food Delivery which makes fresh grocery delivery as simple as your normal online shopping. Our links below allow you to shop without making a list! Just navigate to each ingredient we link and add to your Amazon Prime Whole Foods cart.

Veggies with Dip

Choose from any combination you like for an extra serving of our most under-consumed food: vegetables. Mix and match the vegetables and dips you like. Don't be scared of some extra calories from a dip for an enjoyable snack.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celery• Baby Carrots• Sliced Peppers• Mini Cucumbers• Tomatoes• Sugar Snap Peas• Cauliflower• Broccoli	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Classic Hummus<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roasted Red Pepper• Jalapeno• Lemon• Roasted Garlic• Feta Dip• Tzatziki• Ranch• Guacamole• Pesto• Cilantro Chili Sauce
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Fruit can be a great snack too, but be mindful of fruit's sugar content if you're concerned about nutritional balance. Including vegetables is always a good idea.

Pre-Portioned Nuts

Nuts of all kinds are a great snack that's high in protein (and good for your brain!) but be mindful of portions because the serving size of nuts is often not satisfyingly filling. Pair nuts alongside something less calorie-dense for a well-rounded snack.

Mini Cheese Plates

All the rage right now, cheese plates are great, low-effort snacks that can be incredibly satisfying. Invest in high-quality cheese and pair with crackers, sliced vegetables, nuts, or nothing!

Snacks You Make

With a bit more time, pre-make your own snacks at home which allows for more customization of what you'd like to be eating. Some snacks can be made ahead of time in big batches while others require daily prep.

Granola Bars

Rather than buying granola bars and accepting whatever they come with (flavors and nutrition facts alike) make your own for full control over the outcome.

You'll need:

- Old-Fashioned Oats
- Brown Rice Cereal
- Brown Rice Syrup
- 9 by 13 inch Baking Pan
- Parchment Paper
- Your choice of dried fruit, chopped nuts, and other add-ins
- Your choice of nut/seed butter for flavor and stick
- Your choice of (optional) sweetener like syrups or honey

Use [EatingWell's customizable recipe](#) for guidance on how to create the perfect granola bar for you.

Roasted Chickpeas

As good as they are from a bag, making your own roasted chickpeas allows for customization to any flavor you want.

You'll need:

- Garbanzo Beans
- Olive Oil
- Salt (Maldon flakes are best for finishing)
- Baking Sheets
- Your choice of seasonings

The most important part is to thoroughly dry them with a kitchen towel before baking. You want them to be as dry as possible before baking. Toss them with olive oil and salt.

Then, bake at 425 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes until golden brown and crisp. Bake until crisp regardless of time, you'll notice if they are there. Once done, toss them with another flavor you'd like whether that's brown sugar and cinnamon or fresh lime zest and cumin.

Roasted Pumpkin Seeds

Similar to roasted chickpeas, pumpkin seeds are a crunchy, protein-rich snack that can be customized however you'd like flavor-wise. They are best when you can harvest them fresh (usually when you're carving a Jack-O-Lantern).

You'll need:

- Pumpkin Seeds (if you can't get fresh, raw unroasted are fine too)
- Olive Oil
- Salt (Maldon flakes are best for finishing)
- Baking Sheets

Rinse them thoroughly and try before roasting for 10 minutes at 300 degrees. Then, remove and add your toppings (and a drizzle of olive oil) and bake for 20 to 30 minutes until browned and crunchy.

Spinach or Kale Chips

As a crunchy alternative to pre-bought, bagged chips, baked spinach have the green veggie content we all need more of with the satisfying crunch of a chip. Most of the prep time is in the baking process, so they are easy to make mid-day. These are best enjoyed right away after cooling for the best crunch, but you can save them if you must.

You'll need:

- Baby Spinach
- Lime
- Olive Oil
- Salt (Maldon flakes are best for finishing)
- Baking Sheets

Toss spinach leaves with a big pinch of salt, a drizzle of olive oil, the zest of a whole lime. Then lay out on baking sheets in one even layer. Don't overlap the leaves. Squeeze your lime overtop. Then, bake for 20 to 35 minutes in a 275 degree oven. Some leaves require more or less baking time, so check them and look for a thin, withered appearance. Let them cool completely before enjoying.

Switch up the seasoning as you'd like. Make them spicier with some cumin and chili powder or replace lime with pepper for a classic salt & pepper flavor set.

Small Salads

For a snack-sized portion, scale down your favorite salad recipe into a cup version (rather than a bowl). It's a great way to enjoy a dose of vegetables that can be customized to stay fresh in many different ways.

If you're limiting calories, ditch dressing. Opt for flavor from herbs and additions and just use a drizzle of olive oil for some moisture. For extra nutrition, opt for dark leafy greens as your base rather than lettuce.

Spinach + Feta + Cucumbers + Cherry Tomatoes

Kale (or Spinach) + Goat Cheese + Apples + Pecans

Spinach (or Arugula) + Goat Cheese + Peaches

Shaved Brussel Sprouts + Dried Cranberries + Parmesan + Lemon

Spinach + Basil + Cherry Tomatoes + Mozzarella Pearls

Spinach + Cilantro + Avocado + Tomatoes + Lime + Cotija

For a more satisfying salad (with some warmth) roast one of your toppings to add a warm element. Roasted peaches or tomatoes, for example, bring a different sweetness to a salad.

Remember, to be your most productive self, you have to take care of yourself. That means remembering to eat. Snacks throughout the work day can keep you full and focused until you have time for a proper meal. Work is only one part of productive habits, and it's not even the biggest part.

The better care you take of yourself, the better you will be when it's time to work.

Quick Start Worksheet

You want to be more productive right away, so use this worksheet tonight for a headstart on tomorrow.

What do you need to do?

Think of everything you need to do. Get it all out of your brain and down here.

Now, prioritize.

Mark a due date beside things that have deadlines. Then, circle the items that are most important or most urgent. Identify the three things that you need to do tomorrow based on those circled items. If they are very large tasks, one task might need to be broken into more action items.

Identify any tasks that can be delegated. Consider hiring a service for any household tasks for later in the week so they come off your list.

What's your big three for tomorrow?

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Efficiently tackle your day.

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