

# TO YOUR HEALTH

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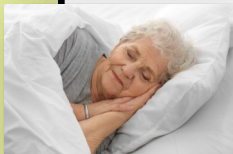
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## The Daily Rituals That Hold Us Together

By Maeve Lobo, LICSW

Besides being incredibly punctual, W. H. Auden lived a life governed by habit. His mornings began, reliably, with a crossword puzzle—an act that suggests both discipline and a tolerance for frustration. Maya Angelou had her 6:00 a.m. coffee; Simone de Beauvoir kept her afternoons reserved for lunch and friends. And the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami once told *The Paris Review* that he goes to bed at 9:00 p.m., which may be the most enviable plot twist of all. Routine, is not merely the scaffolding of a day—it is the humming engine of life.

Routines organize our days and, in turn, regulate how the body functions. Scientists have a name for the relationship between external cues and our internal clocks: *Zeitgeber*—literally, “time givers.” A paper published in 1988 found a correlation between disrupted routines and increased mood disorders among vulnerable individuals. Disruption need not be dramatic, though it often is: a divorce, a layoff, or any event that rearranges the furniture of daily life



Maintaining a regular sleep schedule, eating at predictable times, and sustaining social interactions are not glamorous pursuits, but they are powerful ones. Without structure, the body receives mixed signals, resulting in fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and a general decline in productivity. A well-designed routine acts as an anchor, keeping mind and body in balance.

A 2025 study published by Cambridge University Press found that individuals who maintained a consistent bedtime were significantly less likely to experience depression and anxiety. Adequate sleep, it turns out, is not just restorative—it is preventative. (The clinic, in a nod to this fact, will host a series of summer groups focused on improving sleep in older adults.)

Exercise, meanwhile, enjoys a reputation that is both deserved and slightly tedious: it reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stroke, and it improves mental well-being. A 2018 study in *The Lancet*, based on self-reported data, concluded that exercise reduced the number of poor mental-health days. The sweet spot appeared to be about 45 minutes, three to five times a week. Team sports, cycling, and gym activities were particularly effective.

Walking for just 10 to 15 minutes a day can reduce the risk of depression, according to the American Psychological Association. Physical activity stimulates the production of serotonin and dopamine—chemicals that do a great deal of emotional heavy lifting. In plain terms: moving helps.



The National Alliance on Mental Illness suggests that a thoughtful morning routine can stave off stress and fatigue. Their recommendations are refreshingly simple: ease into the day with natural light, eat breakfast (fuel is not optional), read something to engage the mind, and incorporate a bit of movement. None of this is revolutionary, but then, neither is brushing your teeth—and we persist.

According to psychologist Ron Friedman, checking email first thing in the morning is a “cognitively expensive” task. It makes us reactive rather than proactive. Friedman borrows the culinary term *mise en place*—“putting in place”—to describe the value of organizing one’s day in advance. The first three hours, he argues, are our most productive; they are best spent on meaningful work, leaving the administrative debris for later.

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Two additional considerations: take regular digital breaks—excessive screen time has been linked to symptoms of depression—and stay hydrated. Water, unlike most modern interventions, is both inexpensive and effective.

Habits take time to develop, and they tend to evolve. It is worth reviewing your routine periodically, adjusting it when necessary. If it begins to provoke anxiety rather than relieve it, something has gone awry. You cannot control other people's behavior—family members will continue to be themselves—but you can build contingencies into your day. A routine, after all, is not a prison. At its best, it is a form of quiet, ongoing negotiation with the realities of living.



Sources :

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### Spotlight on Social Work

By Maeve Lovo, LICSW



At a recent meeting of the Women's Group, we found ourselves mulling over a simple question: whom would you invite to dinner who is no longer here? The idea came from Judy Chicago's sculpture *The Dinner Party*.

One member spoke of her great-aunt, with whom she shared a childhood bedroom—a gentle, constant presence. She imagined what it would be like to sit across from her now, as an adult, and talk again.



Her aunt had kept a small box labelled *Because You Like Nice Things*—a cheerful collection of life's luminous treasures. Inside were the member's childhood drawings, carefully saved and quietly cherished. The memory brought warmth to the room; it was the kind that lingers.

Do you have a box like that—real or remembered? A place where small, bright moments are kept safe? If you do, I'd love to hear about it. Or better yet, start a conversation over dinner at the Abbott Dining Room.

### Sleep Well – Developing techniques for a better night's sleep.

This is a three-part program covering fitness, diet, and medication management. The group will run **every Tuesday afternoon at 2:00pm in the Meeting Room on 6/9/26, 7/14/26 and 8/11/26.**

Registration is required and can be completed at the Clinic.

