

Our favorite healthy habits of 2021

The following is excerpted from the article “Our favorite Healthy Habits of 2021” by Tara Parker-Pope, columnist for The New York Times, December 9, 2021.

What good things did you do for yourself in 2021?

From Well, here are 8 of our favorite small habits that can make life a little better.

Give the best hours of your day to yourself.

What time of day do you feel your best? Now ask yourself, “Who gets those hours?” Do you spend your best hours checking emails, catching up on work or doing tasks for your family? Try giving that time to yourself instead. Setting aside your best hours to focus on personal goals and values is the ultimate form of self-care.



Enjoy exercise snacks. Too often we think of exercise as a formal activity we have to do for an hour at the gym each day. But a number of studies show that short bursts of exercise several times a day lead to meaningful gains in fitness and overall health. Just as you might grab a handful of chips or nuts to break the monotony of your day, an exercise “snack” is a quick movement break. Get up and pace when you’re on the phone. Do jumping jacks, lunges, a wall sit or walk the stairs for 20 seconds. My go-to exercise snack is 10 wall push-ups.

Take a gratitude photo. If a gratitude journal isn’t your thing, make a plan to take one photo a day of something special in your life. It can be a cute picture of your dog, a sunset or a delicious meal. Take a moment to study the photo, sit with your feelings of gratitude, and then share it with a friend or post it on social media. When we make an effort to notice our surroundings or show appreciation

for the things that make us happy, it's called "savoring." Savoring exercises can lead to meaningful gains in overall happiness and well-being.

Print a "feelings" list. Every day when you brush your teeth or make your coffee, ask yourself: How are you, really? Think of a word that describes exactly what you're feeling. Unsettled? Energetic? Delighted? Frazzled? (Avoid standard answers like "good," "fine" or "OK.") Studies show that when we label our feelings, it lowers our stress response. Choose from this [list of words, from the Hoffman Institute](#), to describe how you're feeling and post it in your home.

Do a five-finger meditation. This is an easy way to calm yourself, no matter where you are. Use the index finger of one hand to trace the outline of the opposite hand. As you trace up a finger, breathe in. As you trace down, breathe out. Continue finger by finger until you've traced your entire hand. Now reverse directions and do it again, making sure to inhale as you trace up, and exhale as you trace down. ([Watch this simple animation](#) to see how it's done.)

Make it easy. The thing that makes it harder for you to achieve your goal is called friction, which comes in three forms — distance, time and effort. Friction-free habits you'll keep are those that are convenient, happen close to home and don't take much time or effort. For example, one of my goals this year was to cook more and stop ordering takeout or buying store-prepared foods. I read an article on meal kit delivery services and realized I could make home cooking a lot easier on myself. By removing the friction, cooking is now fun, easy and delicious.

Watch the jellyfish. Cord Jefferson, the television writer who thanked his therapist on national television when he won an Emmy Award, told me he struggled with traditional meditation, but he enjoys watching the feed from a web camera showing the [jellyfish at the Monterey Bay Aquarium](#). Bookmark the jelly-cam on your phone or laptop browser and get lost in the gentle pulses of the jellyfish for a short mindfulness break during your workday.

Find a health buddy. Choose a friend who shares your health goals and make a plan. Meet each other once or twice a week for a walking date. Or it could be a daily text check-in to see how you're doing on a diet, or a Zoom call to work together on a decluttering project. Studies show we're more likely to reach our goals when we bring a friend along for the journey.