

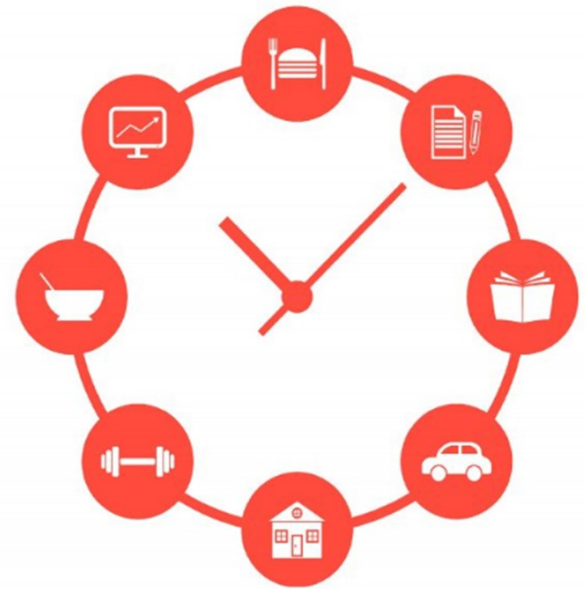
Routine

School is out, vacations are happening, the sun is up long after dinner. These factors, combined with other features of summertime, lead many people to abandon their usual routines in favor of unstructured schedules. But, as summer comes to a close and 'back to school' is on the horizon, it's time to get back to the daily routine – and that's a good thing!

Daily routines may seem boring, but they're important to our lives in many ways:

- **Routines Reduce Stress and Increase Efficiency:** When we have a daily routine, it reduces the need to make decisions throughout the day. With a routine, we know exactly what tasks we need to do and when we need to do them, without having to think too much. When we are finished with one task, we know what comes next. Activities become standardized and we become more efficient as a result.
- **Instills Good Habits:** The secret to building good habits is repetition. When we design a routine that works for us, it facilitates developing good habits by encouraging us to repeat the same tasks over and over again. Just like brushing our teeth every morning, adhering to a routine allows us to foster habits that match our goals and aspirations.
- **Reduces the Need for Willpower:** When we brush our teeth in the morning, it does not require a lot of willpower because most of us have made it a daily ritual. We hardly think about having to brush our teeth; we simply do it. The same holds true for other tasks when we follow a routine. It simply becomes, well, 'routine'!
- **Provides Predictability:** No matter what's going on in our day, knowing that we will be having dinner around 6:00 p.m. and go to bed around 10:00, can be a real comfort. The certainty of our routine can help us to manage the uncertainties that life throws at us. Coping with unpredictable periods of time can feel more doable when we have a little structure in place.

With the change of the seasons, it's a great time to implement a new routine in your life. Establishing a routine is a great way



to tackle goals related to eating habits, exercise and sleep. Think about what your goals are in those areas, and develop a schedule that accommodates those goals. That might mean waking up 20 minutes earlier each day to start a meditation practice, or taking an extra 10 minutes in the evening to pack a healthy lunch for the next day.

Whatever routine you seek to implement, remember to be realistic. Think honestly about what you can maintain as an ongoing routine. Is it realistic to think that you'll get up at 5:00 a.m. five days a week for a new exercise routine? Maybe, but maybe not. Also be sure to coordinate your routine with others in your home and workplace. If your new routine means you take a walk at lunch, be sure that doesn't negatively impact your co-workers, for example.

The benefits of routines come from their consistency and predictability. However, maintaining a routine does require some flexibility. Things will come up that temporarily disrupt your schedule. That's okay. You can do one of two things: adapt for the long term and create a new routine, or understand that this change is temporary, and you can reinstate your routine tomorrow, next week, or in a few months.

For more information on this or other topics, visit FamilyServicesEAP.org.