



The Spirit

SMALL DAILY ACTIONS,
DONE PURPOSEFULLY,
CAN INFUSE MORE
JOY AND SATISFACTION
INTO YOUR LIFE.

by Janet Lee

The healing POWER OF RITUAL

Thrive Tip
Enhance your New Year's resolutions by creating a mindful routine around the making of your list. See yourself achieving them and think about how you'll feel when you do. Then create a step-by-step plan to get there.

**MY
FAVORITE RITUAL**

"Every morning I get my second cup of coffee at my local coffee shop. I've become friends with the baristas there and we banter and joke around about our outfits, the news, or the day's plans. I started this ritual during the pandemic as a reason to get out of the house every day. Even if I didn't talk to anyone else, I knew I could at least have that interaction to get the day off to a good start and not feel isolated." —*Holly St. Lifer, New York City*

Savoring an aromatic cup of tea as you watch the sunrise. Taking a moment before eating to appreciate the food in front of you. Stepping outside before bed to look at the stars. These actions—aka rituals—are small ways of extracting more meaning and pleasure out of life.

More than just rote habits, rituals are imbued with intention. "A ritual is mindful and that's why it's beneficial. You're making the decision to engage with it and you're also likely trying to do it as a type of self-care," says Sadi Fox, PhD, a psychologist and owner of Flourish Psychology in Brooklyn, New York. "Any time we tap into a form of mindfulness it's beneficial. It helps us feel better about ourselves and it may help relieve stress or help us cope with anxiety."

Whether you're doing them to start or end the day, "seal" in an experience, show your love for family or just to give yourself a minute to relax, rituals can be a powerful way to check in and keep yourself on course. "We're constantly seeking 'the way' in life," says Gin Love Thompson, PhD, a psychotherapist in Orlando, Florida. "Rituals help us thrive by setting an intention." Maybe you're appreciating your life or even just a beautiful day, vowing to be

done with a past lover or take new steps toward a goal. "I think it causes a shift and that intention moves into the subconscious. It's more powerful than an affirmation. You can have an elaborate ritual, but if the intention isn't behind it, you're just putting on a performance. It's all about the intention and being in the moment. That's where our power is."

**MY
FAVORITE RITUAL**

"Each year on my birthday, I make sure I get in a workout as a way to honor the good health that brought me to this day and help ensure that I get to celebrate another one." —*Janet Lee, Prairie Village, Kansas*

The New Year is an excellent time for a ritual that expresses gratitude for everything that happened during the prior 365 days or one that helps you release things you've been holding onto that no longer serve you. Then you can set intentions for what's to come, says Thompson. (For a New Year's ritual you can use to set the tone for 2022, turn to page 87.)

Keep these tips in mind to create more powerful rituals:

★ **Find the Right Time** They can be performed daily, monthly, yearly—whenever. "Early in the morning, midday and at night before bed are times of the day that are naturally protected [quieter and not as busy], so it's easier to engage in a ritual," says Fox. If you're a morning person, think about how you want to start your morning and what intention you want to set for the rest of the day. Is it with meditation, prayer or exercise, for example?

"A lot of people's rituals are around getting their first cup of coffee or having their breakfast," says Fox. She has created a feel-good ritual in the evening: stretching her hips before bed. "It helps me feel like I'm winding down and I'm doing it for myself. There's a mind-body connection and it tells my brain that we're approaching sleep." Other good times for a ritual are around birthdays or anniversaries of big events, such as a marriage, graduation or death.



Even something as simple as making the bed with your partner can be a ritual that enhances your connection.

MY FAVORITE RITUAL

"Every night before bed I start my prayers while brushing my teeth. Then I go out front and say good night to my dad (the moon), my mom (the brightest star) and other loved ones who've passed (all the other stars). I come in, make sure all the doors are locked and turn off all the lights. Then I can go to bed." —*Andy Nielsen, Sacramento, California*

★ **Be Present** If you're not paying attention, you're just doing an activity, there's no "ritual" involved. Making dinner for extended family once a month can easily veer into chore territory if you're thinking about everything else you could be doing. But being aware of the prepping, cooking and cleaning it takes while you're doing it and focusing on the love you have for them and how much everyone appreciates what you're doing will help you get more pleasure and meaning out of the event.

★ **Get Grounded** "People can be overly emotional, but not in the right emotions," says Thompson. We worry, become fearful, ruminate, catastrophize, get anxious, all these emotions and thoughts that happen in our head (and sometimes our bodies, too). A ritual that helps you get grounded—feeling centered and stable and in the moment—can help take you out of that heady, spiraling sensation that comes with many feelings. "I love to sit by a tree and think about the roots going down deep into the ground," says Fox. "Being in touch with nature is very grounding for me. If you can't get

out and sit on the ground, you can still close your eyes and take some deep breaths while you're thinking about being in nature and sitting next to a tree."

★ **Do a Self-Check** A glass of red wine at the end of the week, a decadent cupcake on your birthday—these are enjoyable rituals to mark ends and beginnings, but if it turns into a glass of red wine or cupcake at the end of every day or whenever you're stressed-out, that ritual may be headed down the wrong path, toward being a coping mechanism. "That glass of wine before bed may feel good and help you fall asleep quickly, but it also messes with your circadian rhythms during the night," says Fox. That cupcake is adding empty calories that your body might not need at 10 p.m. Rituals around food and drink also have the potential to set up unhealthy relationships that can be hard to break.



Create rituals that have meaning for *you*, not just something a friend or a social media influencer told you to do.

A Happy Way To Start the New Year!

For many people, the turn of the calendar in January is a fresh start. File last year away and start again with renewed energy. Making New Year's resolutions is a way to celebrate that "fresh start" energy—still ripe with possibility—and set intentions for the coming months. They can be powerful, but they're often short-lived.

Psychotherapist Gin Love Thompson, PhD, suggests coming into the year with less rigidity. "I think the powerful way of looking at it is going into the New Year without an agenda," she says. "Yes, we have our goals and we know what we want to accomplish but the ritual should be around where we give thanks and welcome in what is ours to receive. We don't know what that is yet. When we open ourselves to that divine energy and welcome it, amazing things can happen that surpass what our agendas are."

Before you can welcome in the new, Thompson says you have to clear out the old. You can do that in many ways. You may write down what you're happy to say goodbye to and burn the list in a fire; work

out while visualizing all the negative energy from 2021 leaving your body; sage your home or office by lighting a small bundle of dried sage, which kills bacteria, to clear out negative energy; or just do some good old-fashioned breathwork, thinking about drawing in positive light and love with each inhale and letting go of any darkness or negativity with each exhale.

Thompson likes to kick off the New Year with a body scan meditation: Find a comfortable spot to rest where you won't be interrupted or tempted to fall asleep. Lie faceup and take a few deep breaths to ground yourself. "You go from head to toe, listening to your body, letting it relax and asking what it needs," says Thompson. Start at the top of your head and work your way down through the neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, belly, pelvis, legs, ankles and feet, ending at your toes, taking slow, deep breaths as you go. End the scan with a few deep breaths, this time breathing in possibility and positivity and letting the exhale anchor these deep within you.



Creating resolutions can be a ritual if you're intentional and take time to see yourself achieving them.



HOW TO LIVE WELL

*THESE EXPERTS SHARE
THEIR BEST ADVICE FOR
THRIVING. HERE'S HOW THEY
MAKE THE MAGIC HAPPEN
IN THEIR OWN LIVES.*



Create a Boundary

"I love my end-of-work routine where I take a walk around the block. This has truly helped me separate work from life and connect with what's in front of me, which ultimately reduces burnout, irritability and stress."

Katie Miles, LMFT, a San Diego-based licensed psychotherapist and the co-founder of the online journaling and habit tracking tool Habitbetter





Stick to It

“For me it’s about being consistent with my exercise. It’s about checking a box and I like to check boxes. I work out four to five times a week and then I also go for walks even if it’s just 15 minutes a day.”

Anthony Wall, personal trainer and senior director of global business development for the American Council on Exercise

A common theme here is taking time for yourself, whether it’s through exercise, healthy boundaries or being creative.

Clean Your Slate

“I’d love to say I start every day with yoga or that I listen to inspiring podcasts, but thriving for me comes from maintaining connections and relationships and gracing myself with a fresh start every day.” —*Diana Direiter, PhD, a licensed clinical psychologist, associate professor of psychology and the dean of faculty at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Heat It Up

“Sweating is a big way to stay healthy. It keeps the detox pathways open, lengthens telomeres and may improve longevity [by potentially reducing oxidative damage]. That’s why saunas are so important. I like to warm up through heat therapy or exercise. I do think the heat in a hot yoga class is a little bit addicting... you feel renewed.” —*Sara Peternell, holistic nutritionist in the Denver area*

Play More

“I keep dreaming and keep playing. One of the most self-sabotaging things we do to ourselves is stop playing. Whether it’s making art or riding a bike or whatever gives you that feeling you had when you were a kid, whatever you have to do to get to that place, that’s where the magic happens. That’s thriving in life.” —*Gin Love Thompson, PhD, poet, author and psychotherapist in Orlando, Florida*

Make Self-Care a Priority

“My work-life balance is my key to thriving. I don’t overwork. I take breaks when I need them and prioritize things outside of work. I know I won’t be beneficial to patients if I’m burnt out and I have an ethical obligation to be there for clients. Don’t skip self-care.” —*Sadi Fox, PhD, therapist and owner of Flourish Psychology in Brooklyn, New York*

Feed Your Soul

“I exercise every day, eat very well, take a few supplements and I spend five to 15 minutes a day sitting and looking out the window at the trees and trying to get out of my head and see the real world. I’m a big reader and I have crazy good friendships. I also spend a lot of time by myself and all of those nourish me.” —*Kathy Sisson-Cross, certified health coach in Bermuda Dunes, California*

Stay Curious

“My family and I are curious about everything. We question things and we engage in deep conversations, especially during our daily walks. We also play games and music together.” —*Dean Sherzai, MD, PhD, MPH, co-author of The 30-Day Alzheimer’s Solution in Loma Linda, California*



Walk and Learn

“I’m constantly learning and I maximize that when I do physical activity. I listen to podcasts and educate myself about ways to improve cognitive health and longevity while I do my steady-state cardio training, namely fast walking. Doing cognitive activity during exercise is incredibly beneficial to the brain.”

Richard S. Isaacson, MD, director of the Center for Brain Health and the Alzheimer’s Prevention Clinic at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton