

REAL SIMPLE

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9 Ways to Speed Up Your Family's Morning Routine

Getting your family up and at 'em is no small feat. Follow these simple tips to start the day on the right foot.

Wake-Up Call

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Mornings don't have to revolve around blaring alarms, tantrum-throwing toddlers, forgotten backpacks, picky (or non-) eaters and mad dashes to the car.

We believe that time is money, and streamlining your life and clearing your mind is key to being the most successful version of you. And we all know mornings can be one of the most difficult times of day when you have a family. (Second only, maybe, to bedtime.)

So let's start with the basics: The three ground rules of an incredibly successful morning routine include:

1. It exists. Morning routines make sure the really important things get done. Even if you can't control the phone calls or assignments you'll receive throughout the rest of your day, you usually can control your mornings and evenings.
2. It reflects what's important. If you don't have a specific time set aside for things that matter—whether that's getting your kids to brush their teeth or finding some time to write your personal memoir—the best way to make sure they don't fall through the cracks is to turn them into habits.
3. It's firm. If you allow yourself to press the snooze button, or skip a step (like breakfast) to save time, your routine loses its oomph. Especially when kids are involved, you have to stand your ground: These routines should be nonnegotiable.



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Click on the next slide for our step-by-step rundown of the perfect morning routine.

Start Your Morning Routine at Night

It's definitely harder to get a kid up in the morning if she didn't get the rest she needed the night before.

Here's a handy guide to how much sleep children of different ages should be getting each night:

- Infants: about 15 hours
- Toddlers: at least 12 hours
- Elementary and middle schoolers: at least 10 hours
- Teens: at least 8 hours

And don't forget yourself. Adults should get at least 7 hours of sleep each night. Good sleep leads to better memory and problem-solving skills, the ability to empathize with others and, for kids, a higher IQ.

If you have trouble getting a hyperactive child to calm down at night, try giving her a protein-rich bedtime snack a half hour before bedtime. A glass of milk works well because it contains tryptophan, a protein which is a natural sleep inducer.



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Plan Clothing in Advance

Lay out everything your kids—and you—will wear the next day, the night before. Clothing is a great way for kids to showcase their individuality, so they should definitely play a role in choosing, but make a strict rule that there's no backsliding in the morning.

Check the weather forecast ahead of time to see if there's a chance of rain ... or cold. Then, plan everything from the outfit itself to matching shoes and accessories—including socks, shoes, jewelry and hair ties—a sure-fire way to prevent last-minute scrambling.



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Start Your Day Before Everyone Else Does

Even if you're not a morning person, resolve to get up before the rest of the family so you can take time to care for your own health. Research has shown that exercising first thing in the morning, before eating breakfast, is powerful.

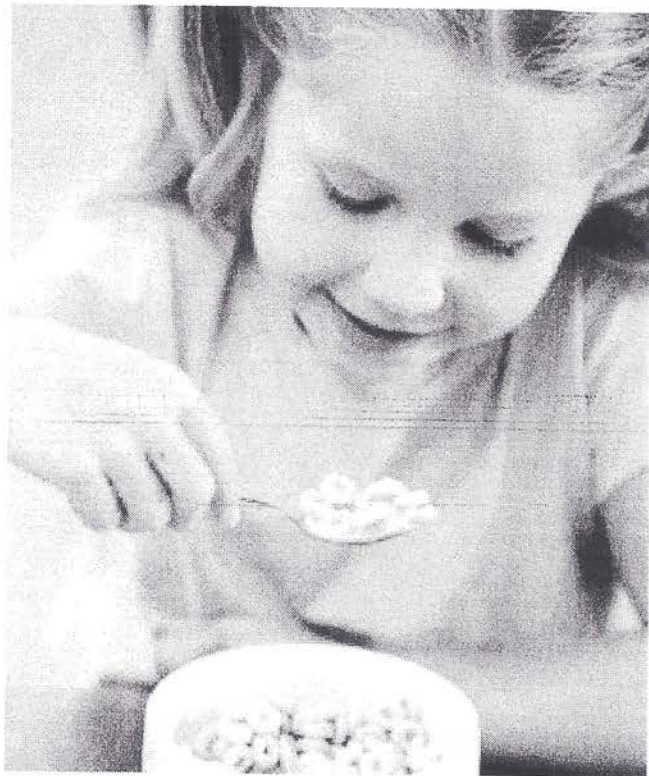
In this study, one group of people ate breakfast, then exercised, drinking sports drinks throughout their workouts. The other group worked out, drinking only water, before eating breakfast. Both groups consumed the same total calories and performed the same workout, but the group that exercised *before* eating kept off weight far better.



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Dress Them Before Breakfast

Unless your kids are seriously messy eaters, make a rule that everyone should be dressed for the day before you break out the cereal and O.J. That way they can enjoy a leisurely breakfast instead of inhaling their food in the rush to get ready.



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Prepare Breakfast Ahead of Time

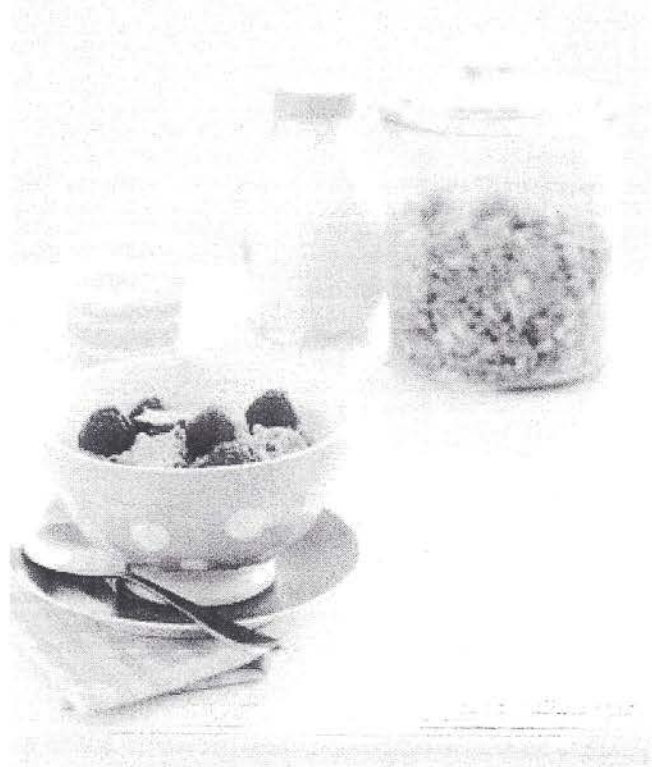
One quick way to streamline your routine? Make breakfast a painless process. Of course, this first meal of the day is crucial for providing kids—and you—with the nutritious fuel for the day, and eating breakfast is associated with maintaining a healthy weight. Here are some ways to make that perfect, healthy breakfast a reality:

—Stick with quick, nutritious meals, like oatmeal with fresh fruit; bagels and cream cheese with cucumbers and tomatoes; and parfaits with yogurt, fruit and granola.

—If you bake, make extra bread or scones and freeze them for the mornings. Pop them in the oven or microwave to defrost while you get dressed and start waking up the kids.

—Frozen fruit can be expensive, but it's easy to buy fresh fruit, chop it up and freeze to make quick smoothies.

—Homemade pancake batter will keep for a few days in the fridge, so you can make it ahead of time and use it throughout the week.



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Make It a Game

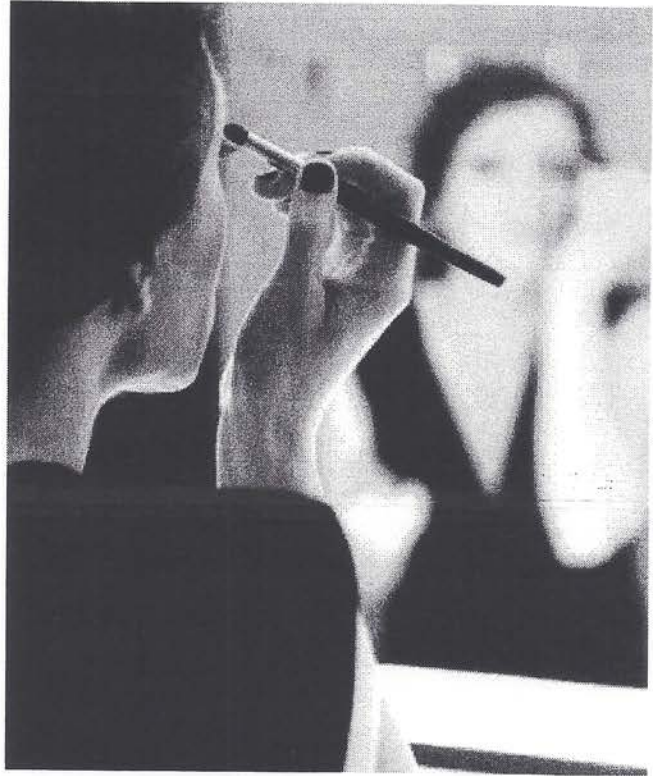
Motivate your little dawdlers with achievable morning "mini" goals. For example, try playing a CD and asking them to complete a different task for each song that plays: Get dressed by the end of track one, brush teeth by track two, have shoes tied by track five, etc.



Jamie Grill/Getty Images

Set Aside a Little Primping Time

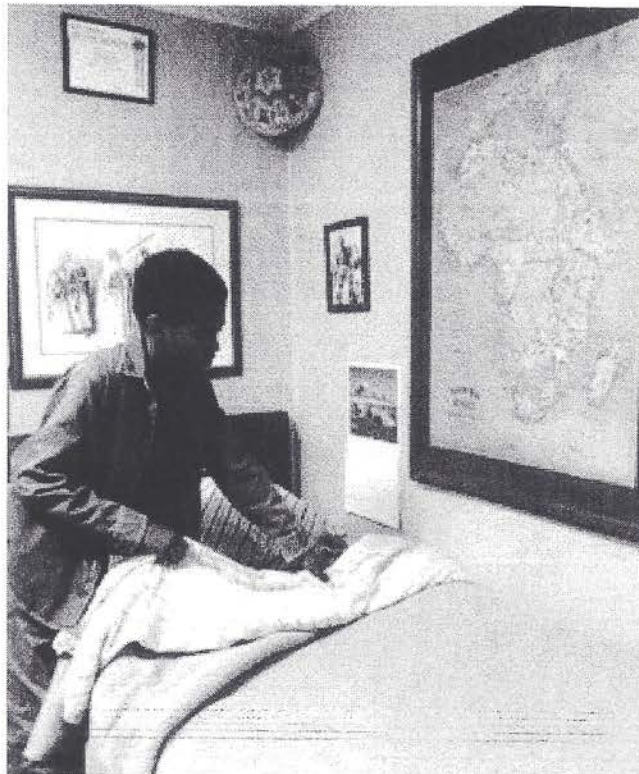
Although we don't think that wearing makeup should be a prerequisite for success, you do want to look and feel your best. A study from the London College of Fashion found that, for 85 percent of respondents, wearing makeup lifted their moods. And let's not even get into the study saying that women who wear it are perceived as more competent and get ahead in the workplace.



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Set Them Up for Success

Don't give your kids more chores and to-dos than necessary in the morning. It's fine to ask them to make their beds, but don't attach additional household chores to the mix. Trying to squeeze those in before you get out the door sets all of you up to feel frantic.



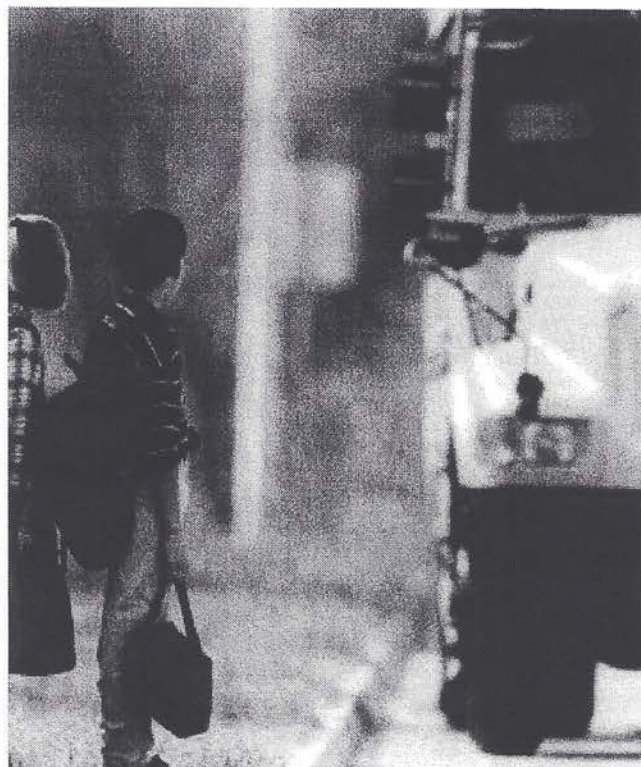
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Invoke Consequences

Finally, your awesome routine won't do much good if it's not followed. Your kids need to know you're serious, so consider rewards for good behavior (and morning deadlines met), and punishment for the opposite.

Maybe the first person who gets up and out the door gets a sticker, or a special chocolate chip pancake. If they don't get up on the first call, maybe they'll have to go to sleep earlier that night to "pay back" the time they overslept.

Remember: It's all designed to make the mornings as easy on all of you as possible.



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