

Your Perfect Day

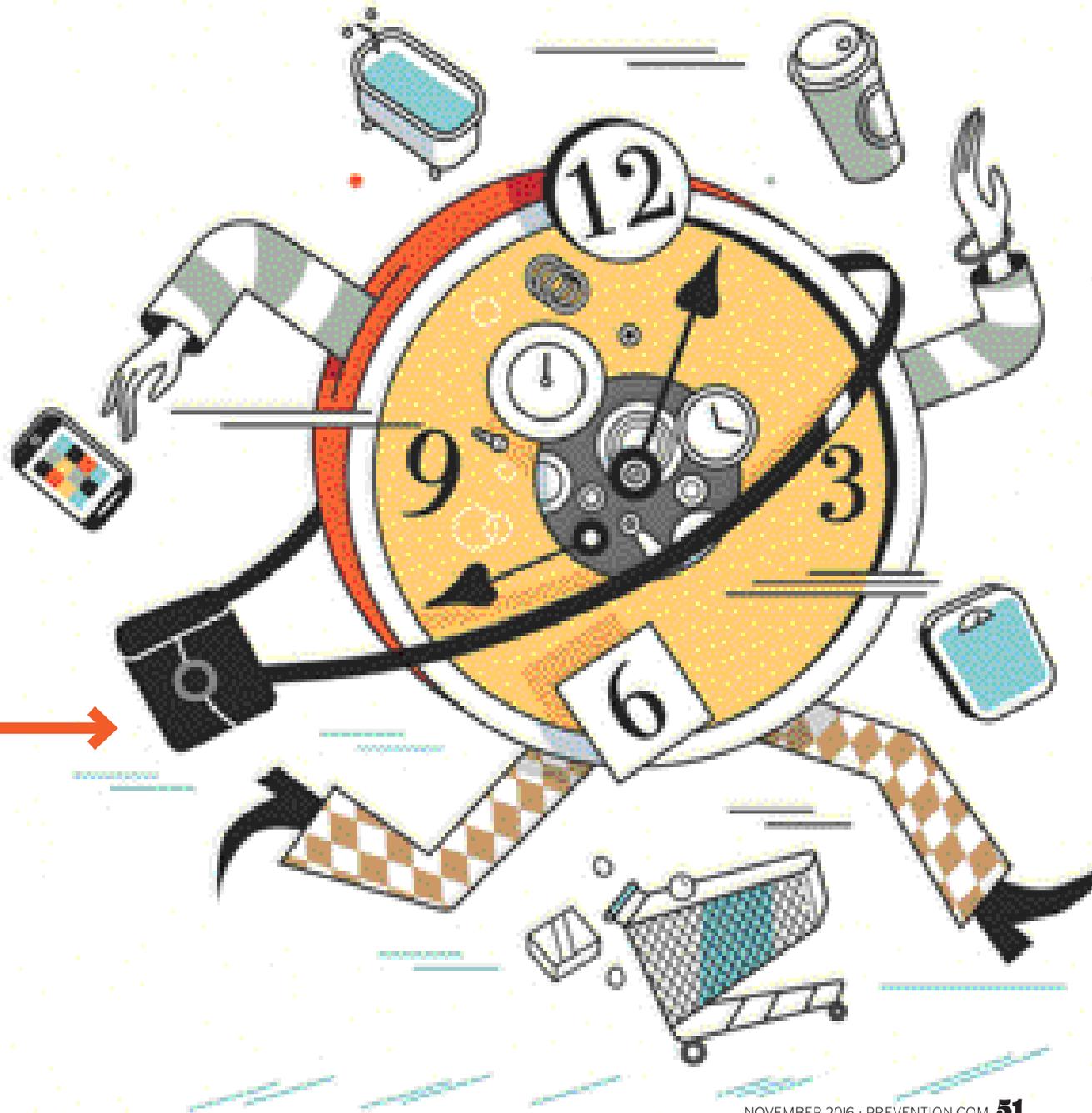
AN HOUR-BY-HOUR GUIDE

Is your brain a beehive of activity?

Are you frequently multitasking, even though recent research shows that our minds are not meant to? (One study finds that multitasking can even temporarily lower your IQ as much as if you'd lost a night's sleep.) If you're still struggling to cram everything you can into a 24-hour cycle, stop. Calm down, take a deep breath, and let our health and wellness experts offer you the ideal, sometimes surprising, times to do almost anything.

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GET INTIMATE
7 AM

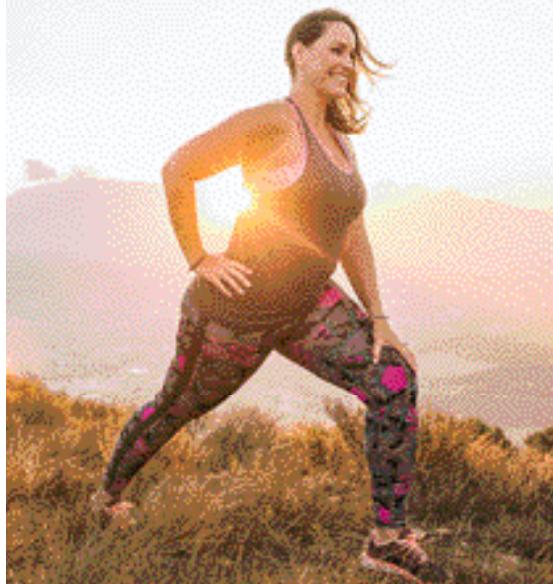
→ Instead of reaching for the snooze button, reach for your partner. Men's and women's testosterone levels (which play a big role in arousal) are at their peak first thing in the morning and lowest around bedtime, when most people have sex.

**Get Weighed**
7:30 AM

→ Jump on the scale at the same time once or twice a week, advises Lisa Young, an adjunct professor of nutrition and food studies at New York University.

Break a Sweat**7:35 AM**

→ Rather than wait for a weekend treadmill session, take a brisk prebreakfast walk instead. You'll burn more fat because you haven't yet consumed any carbs, so the body can't turn to them first for energy. An early workout can also help you stick to your fitness goals. "You're less likely to skip out on exercise if you do it in the morning," says G. Ryan Shelton, medical director of internal medicine at Mecklenburg Medical Group SouthPark in Charlotte, NC. Plus, it adds mental focus and energy to the start of your day.

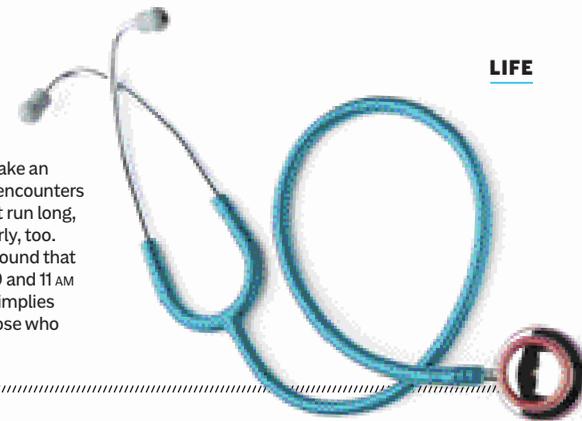
**EAT BREAKFAST****8 AM**

→ Time your morning meal to within an hour or two of getting up. "Waiting too long to eat breakfast can cause your blood sugar to dip," Young says, adding that you'll feel famished later. If you have a high-protein breakfast, you'll eat less later in the day.

FROM TOP: GALLERY STOCK; WINNIE BRUCE/OFFSET

See a Doctor**9 AM**

→ You can avoid a long wait if you make an early appointment, before your doctor encounters distractions or other appointments that run long, says Shelton. Try to get your flu shot early, too. University of Birmingham researchers found that people who were vaccinated between 9 and 11 AM had a higher antibody response, which implies they may gain more protection than those who receive vaccinations in the afternoon.

**Have Your First Coffee****10 AM**

→ Your usual habit of reaching for the java as you're turning off your alarm is unwise, says sleep specialist and clinical psychologist Michael J. Breus, author of the new book *The Power of When*. "On first waking, you have high levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which makes you feel more awake and alert. If you add caffeine, all you're doing is making yourself feel jittery."

FROM TOP: GETTY IMAGES; HSHIANG LIU; VGAJIC

TACKLE A BIG PROJECT, DO YOUR TAXES, FINISH YOUR NOVEL...OR JUST WORK ON A CROSSWORD PUZZLE**11 AM**

→ You're at your sharpest mentally by midmorning, when your grogginess is gone (and by now you're fully caffeinated, since coffee's effects kick in after about 10 minutes and last 4 to 6 hours). Productivity is also high because the activity is still relatively new—the longer we work at something, the less efficient we become. If you tackle tough work now, Breus says, you'll get it done in record time.



pm

Eat Lunch **12 PM**

→ Aim to eat your midday meal about 4 hours after having breakfast, Young says. And if you can, enjoy another walk for 10 to 15 minutes before you take a bite. This will tamp down your appetite so you'll make healthier choices at lunch as well as avoid your coworker's candy bowl later on, adds Breus.

Fill Your Fridge

1 PM

→ According to a Cornell University study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, hungry shoppers fill their carts with more calories. Food shopping in the hours postlunch and presnack—or between 1 and 4 PM—resulted in a lower calorie total for groceries than shopping closer to dinnertime. A bonus in the early afternoon, says Young, is fresher produce, because employees restock shelves with new shipments in the late morning.



Take a Nap

2 PM

→ Now is the time to steal some shut-eye. You can reinvigorate yourself with 15 minutes of rest, according to Breus. Stick to a short snooze so you don't enter deep sleep; otherwise, you can end up feeling groggy than when you started.

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MAKE A BIG DECISION

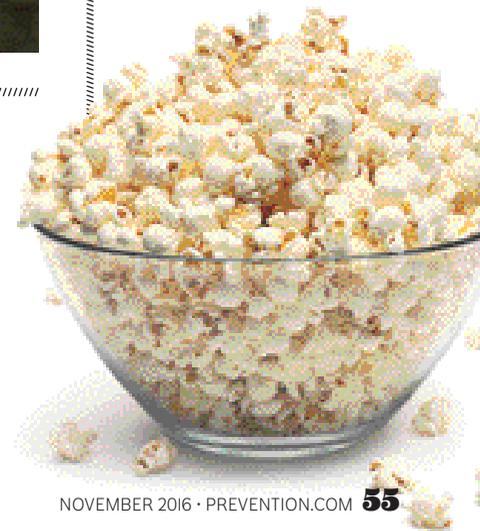
3 PM

→ Aim extra brainpower at your biggest problem in midafternoon, when emotion, hunger, and fatigue have the least chance of clouding your judgment. "You want to have some oomph in you but not be overwhelmed by stress," says psychologist Elizabeth Lombardo. While you're deciding, you may want to skip the trip to the ladies' room. In a study published in the journal *Psychological Science*, people tasked with finding solutions on a full bladder tended to make better decisions, thanks to what the researchers called "increased impulse control in the behavioral domain."

Attack a Snack

4 PM

→ Midafternoon nibblers pick healthier bites, according to a University of Illinois at Chicago study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. The researchers found that afternoon snackers ate more fiber, fruit, and veggies than morning snackers did and also lost more weight. Young's advice: Grab a snack more than 2 hours after you ate your last meal to help keep you satisfied for the 7 hours between lunch and dinner.



LIFE

Eat Dinner 7 PM

→ Your last meal of the day should also be the smallest—and, best-case scenario, finished before 8 PM. Eating within 3 hours of bedtime can lead to digestive trouble and disrupted sleep, Young says.



POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA 8 PM

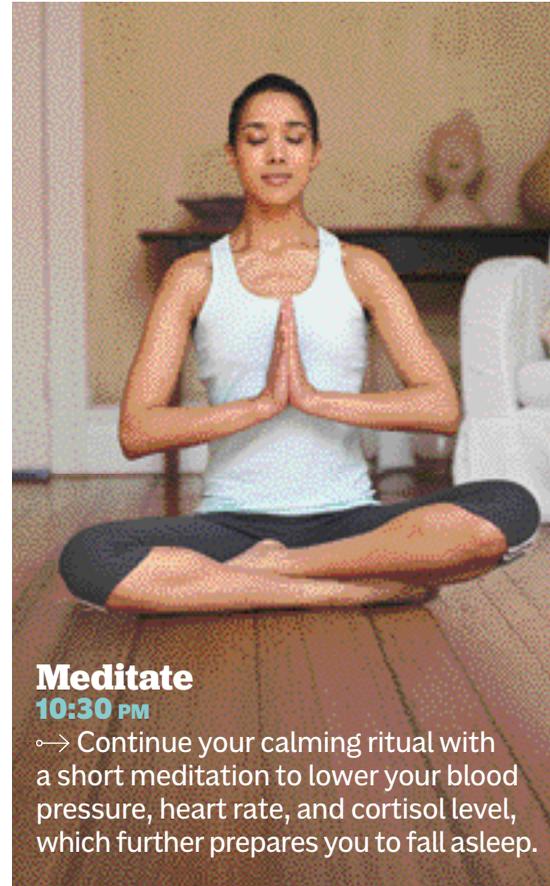
→ This is prime time for social networking, when posts get the most likes, shares, and comments. It's also a healthy time to post. You're staring at the screen far enough from bedtime that the screen time won't disturb your sleep cycle—or your mood. The more time you spend browsing social media sites, the more likely you are to get depressed, according to new research. “Social media posts aren't what you want to put into your mind right before you go to sleep,” Lombardo says.

Watch the Tube 9 PM

→ When you push back your bedtime to squeeze in “just one more episode,” it confuses your brain, which is accustomed to entering sleep mode at a particular time. If you must catch up on a show, finish your screen session—which includes your computer and your phone—by 10 PM to ensure restful sleep.

Take a Bath 10 PM

→ Now that you've powered down your devices, a late-evening bath is a great way to power yourself down. Core body temperature naturally drops at night, signaling the brain that sleep is on the way. A warm bath artificially raises body temperature; then, when you get out of the tub, the exaggerated cooldown is a clear sign that it's time for bed.



Meditate 10:30 PM

→ Continue your calming ritual with a short meditation to lower your blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol level, which further prepares you to fall asleep.

CALL IT A NIGHT 11 PM

→ While sleep needs vary from person to person, between 7 and 9 hours is considered optimal for healthy adults, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Experts advise calculating your bedtime in 90-minute sleep cycles. Ideally, you'd complete at least four cycles each night, though five is even better.



GET OUT OF BED 11:20 PM

→ If you're wide awake 20 minutes or more after tucking in, get up. Resist the urge to peek at a screen, which will further interrupt your sleep. Calm yourself by reading, meditating, or doing breathing exercises. Keep the lights dim. After 10 to 15 minutes, head back to bed and try again. Sweet dreams, and please don't try to fall asleep by counting the things on your to-do list or you'll undo the equilibrium you've gained, we hope, from this guide to good timing. ■

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