

CREATING YOUR BEST MORNING

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

Picture this: You're getting ready for a job interview. Your hair is done, new chic outfit, freshly manicured nails. Alternatively, picture this: You roll out of bed, show up for the interview in your sweats and forget to brush your teeth. Which one would have a better chance of landing you the job?

[Ok, fine. COVID-times, pants-less interviews may be a thing.]

You can see the benefit of being prepared for an interview. What do you do to prepare yourself for your day?

Working from home since March, it was easy to fall into the routing of sleeping until 7, making my espresso shot and sitting down to work at my laptop right away. I don't care how awesome your manager is, do not let their email be the first thing you pay attention to in the morning. Since August, I have been taking a few minutes in the morning to pet my dog before I start my day, sometimes even before I'm out of bed. Then I move into the day with a soft calm energy instead of the eyeball-assaulting, ever-productive and astringent computer screen. Trust me, my coworkers like my morning emails more now.

If you live with kids, parents, spouse, or roommate – this may be your only chance to focus on simply yourself. And you deserve to pay yourself a little attention before you begin helping others.

“Morning is an important time of day, because how you spend your morning can often tell you what kind of day you are

going to have.” – Lemony Snicket

I picked up many of these habits in an Ayurvedic Medicine Class hosted by Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy. Ayurveda is Yoga's sister science: an ancient lifestyle science for whole body health. These are simply the recommendations that worked really well for me, my classmates and my clients. If you want to delve deeper – consider an online course at Ayurveda.com or meeting with an Ayurvedic practitioner. I've been



doing this morning routine experiment – or *dinacharya* as it is properly called – for myself, and it's made a huge impact on my days and my happiness.

If you scroll through the rest of this article – this looks like it would take an eternity, and you would be late for everything. I've managed to get this down to 30 minutes when needed. It goes even faster if you can stop checking your phone.

It starts the night before – get on a consistent schedule. Autumn is a time of transition. With it getting dark earlier, make it a

point to get in bed earlier. If for no other reason, your health. Make it the norm. I was incredibly resistant to getting in bed at 9:30 and waking up at 5:30. The first week was a struggle. But I stuck with it and now when the sun goes down, my body starts to feel more tired and easily falls asleep. Also, try to put all technology away for one to two hours before bed. Instead of working from your phone in bed, let it wait until tomorrow. If you are unsure what to do with yourself without a screen, maybe you watch the sunset or take in the darkness of the sky, connecting your body's own natural rhythm to nature.

The first week you may be hitting snooze when your alarm goes off, that's ok. Pick a time that is consistent, so that your body can find a rhythm.

Warm water with lemon or lime... even before coffee. I love coffee. Honestly I'll probably never give it up. But now I make a cup of water with lime and

that's the first thing I sip on everyday. Type-A personalities go for Lime, everyone else can do lemon. This aids digestion before letting the caffeine shock my system. It is an intentional yet easy wake-up. The world is quiet at this hour. The hot water feels soothing and cleansing at the same time, and it gives that warm and cozy feeling that a mug of coffee does. Are there herbs or spices you really love? Maybe you add them.

Now move. I actually really enjoy taking a morning walk. Even in Autumn, when the air is crisp. When else are you guaranteed a little moderate exercise in the day? Feel one

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foot on the ground after the other. If there is some other type of movement you like to do, go for it. I am including a yoga sequence here designed for grounding – unlike the fall wind. If you need something more intense you can add sun salutations but make them slow and deliberate. Hold each posture for at least three breaths. Be like the earth, not the leaves blowing by your window. If you listen to your body you will notice it craves different movement in different seasons. If you're a runner, maybe you go longer distances one season and incorporate some sprint work in others. Listen and see what body needs. Sometimes when I feel like I'm always on the go, I will crawl around in the morning – or lay down, extend my arms above head and roll around side to side. It sounds ridiculous, but it's fun and builds brain cells - because we don't do that type of movement much. Our bodies crave it.

YOGA SEQUENCE:

Supine Twist: Wiggle your hips to the right and let your shins drop to the left, if your right shoulder lifts off the ground no big deal. Repeat on the opposite side.

Hip Circles: Come to hands and knees and move your whole body clockwise. Switch directions when it feels right. Any other wiggles or presses into the ground are welcome here, you are saying good morning to your body and asking what it needs.

Child's Pose: Big toes come together, knees as far apart as is comfortable. Shift your hips to your heels and let your arms rest.

Lightning Bolt Pose: This is a big foot stretch, tuck your toes under and sit on your heels.

Gate Pose: Balance on your right shin like a kickstand on the mat. Press your left foot and right hand into the mat for balance. How high you lift your left hand and torso is up to you. Play with it. Repeat on the other side and then move between the two, alternating.

Staff Pose: Sit up as tall as you can – best posture of the day so far. If you feel your spine moving into flexion, sit up on a pillow or blanket. Spread your fingers and press your hands into the ground for support. Flex your feet.

Warrior 2: Come to stand with your feet 3-5 feet apart. Turn your left toes out and bend your left knee. Arms are optional. Repeat on the other side.

Wide Legged Down Dog: Parallel your feet, fold over your hips and walk your hands forward so you have weight on all four points of contact.

Tree Pose: Balance on your left leg, turn the right leg out and bend the right knee. Right toes can stay on the ground or move up your left leg. Repeat on the other side.

Pep Talk: Bring feet wider than your hips, bend your knees and bring your forearms onto your thighs. Fine extension in the spine.

Half Frog Pose: (My favorite quad stretch!) Lay on the ground, left forearm across the top of your mat. Kick your right heel to your right glute, grab it with your right hands if you can. If not, you can use a scarf or strap to catch it.

Legs Up the Wall: Place a blanket against the wall. Roll onto your side, with your glutes almost touching the wall, then roll onto your back.

Meditation or Positive Affirmations. Our thoughts can be our best friends or our worst enemies. They help us gracefully move through reality, or stick us on a hamster wheel of fear and frustration throughout the day. Meditation can decrease your stress levels and is great for your overall emotional health. So now after you have exercised your body, exercise your mind. I'll be honest, the past few years I have not meditated as much as I have preached its benefits. By the end of the day, I would find myself falling asleep. So a few minutes in the morning has let me build a consistent routine. Meditation can look different for different people but it can be quite simple to start. Set a timer for one minute on your phone. Close your eyes. You can notice your inhale, and notice your exhale for a minute.

Think “notice breathing in, notice breathing out.” Some of my clients take this time to pray. Some will recite a mantra – which can also be anything that resonates with you. How about “I am calm”, “I am here” or “I am strong.”? Once a minute comes easily, add 30 seconds to the timer the next day. Keep adding day after day. Five minutes a day is fantastic. You can meditate for longer but it takes serious dedication in our busy world. See if you can keep all of your focus on yourself and your own experience. Sometimes I will even do this facing East so with my eyes closed, I can ever so vaguely experience the sunrise.

Savor a warm breakfast. Especially in autumn, when the air gets cool and dry – try to eat something warm and nourishing in the morning. In the past I would often grab a granola bar on the way out the door or while I was typing. Without really tasting it. Lately I've been making oatmeal with nut butter



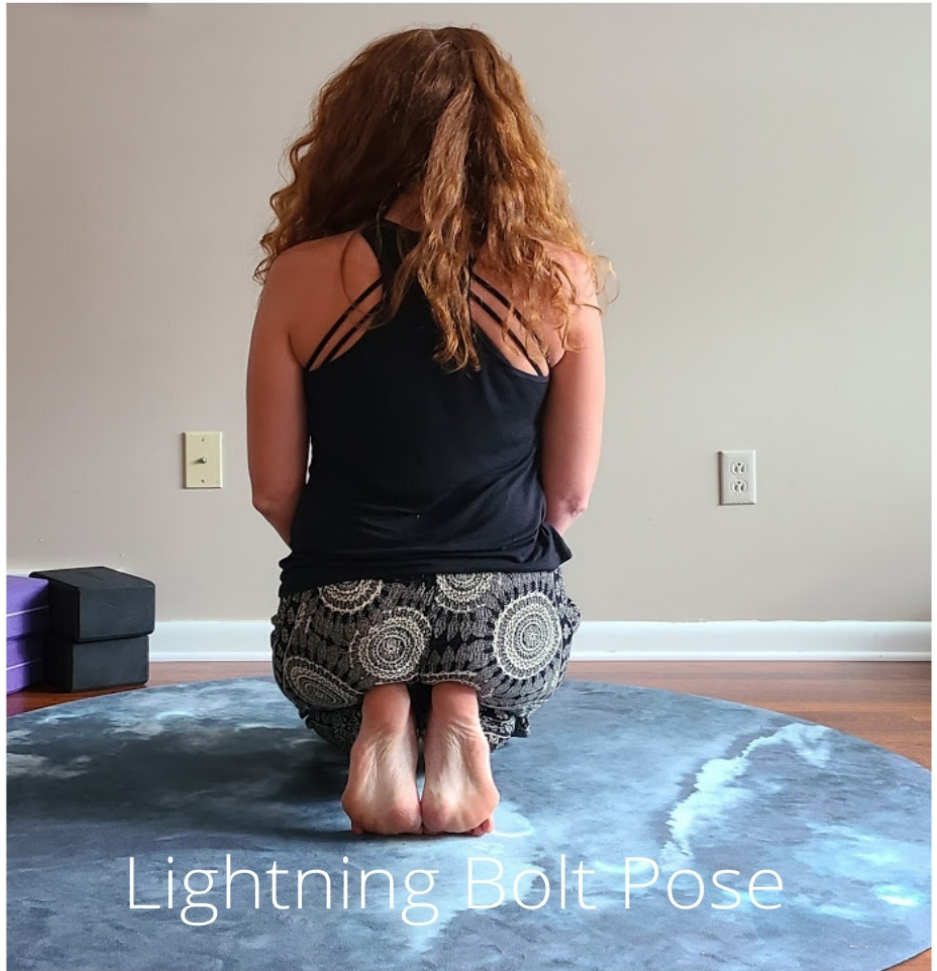
Supine Twist



Hip Circles



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Pep Talk



Legs Up The Wall Pose

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(plus chocolate chips when I am craving a sweet), or sauteing eggs and veggies. If bread is your thing, warm it up and add ghee or butter instead of dry toast.

Then without the news on, without scrolling through your phone, enjoy. Smell what you cooked, take it in with your eyes, taste it, feel it on your tongue. The first time I had a phone-less breakfast, I could not believe how buttery-delicious my toast tasted. I had had the same toast for weeks and never paid attention! It felt decadent, which I realize sounds crazy. Personally, I've found this keeps

me feeling sustained until lunch time, and that means my productivity in the morning is higher with fewer distractions. Fully experiencing my food and its texture and flavor makes me feel less deprived later in the day and I'm less likely to get cravings for over-sugary or salty foods.

Just like your movement, this routine will shift seasonally. Meditating outdoors in the summer and by the Christmas tree in December are two different experiences. Notice how they land in your body. Of course, late nights will happen and you'll want to sleep in, but

this morning routine has really become sacred for me, so I hope you try it, stick to it and enjoy it as much as I have been. Kaitlyn Vittozzi is a Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapist and RYT-500 Yoga Instructor. Her specialties are chronic pain, stress, and postpartum anxiety. Visit TozziYoga.com for more information, or to schedule a session.