



Less Is More: How to Simplify Your Life

Life today is complicated. Most Americans are pulled in multiple directions every day by commitments to their families, workplaces and communities. Many people have responded to the pressures of modern life by seeking ways to consciously simplify their routines and attitudes at home and work.

“The goal of living a more simple life isn’t to arrive at a static point in your life but to become skilled at balancing your personal relationships, workplace issues, finances and other demands,” says Heather G. Mitchener, co-author of *The 50 Best Ways to Simplify Your Life*.

Live in the Moment

One way to simplify your life is to practice mindfulness—to slow down and recognize and appreciate the simple things in life. To be mindful instead of mindless, stay in the moment and be conscious of what you’re doing. Don’t think ahead or look back.

“When we look ahead constantly, we not only rush through the less pleasant tasks, we also tend to hurry through the things we love to do, because we’re always thinking or worrying about what we have to do next,” says Ms. Mitchener.

A good way to practice being in the moment is to follow your breath, a technique that doesn’t require any special training or self-consciousness. To breathe mindfully, take notice of your breaths and try to make them as calm and even as possible. Your breaths should be long and slow and should come from your diaphragm rather than your upper chest. Pay attention to each breath, letting thoughts fall away.

“You can do this exercise any time you think of it,” says Ms. Mitchener. “Make it a goal to be mindful, in general, but also set aside short periods to practice. This will improve your ability to make mindfulness a habit. As you learn to live this way, you’ll feel more centered.”

Slow Down

If you feel like you have too much information in your life, stop subscriptions to magazines, newspapers or email newsletters you rarely have time to read. Leave the radio and TV off unless you’re really listening to something that matters to you. Turn off your cell phone unless you’re making a call or waiting for one that’s important.

To reduce the amount of stuff in your home, ask yourself these questions before you buy something: Do I really need it? How often will I wear or use it? Where will I store it? Is there a reason why I must buy it?

Get Organized

Begin by sizing up the problem areas in your home or workplace and making a plan of attack. If you’re easily discouraged, start with a small, confined area, such as a single drawer. Otherwise, target an area that gives you the most grief. Your goal should be to clear out clutter that causes you to waste time—a hall closet that has become a catchall for everything from clothes to sports equipment.

Learn to focus at work. Multitasking can be an asset, but often the lack of focus it requires means you actually get less done in a day, or less done well. To increase your focus and break free from distractions:

- Begin each day by setting priorities on what you want to accomplish.
- Check email at set times, rather than letting each new message interrupt you.
- Set aside a time to retrieve voice mail and return calls.
- Keep a calendar of your deadlines and obligations.

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Lifting Your Way to Weight Loss

If you've tried dozens of diets but the pounds always sneak back, you may be able to lose them for good by making strength training an integral part of your weight loss program.

"Using your muscles can help you achieve and maintain a healthful weight," says Wayne L. Westcott, Ph.D., author of *Strength Training Past Fifty*. Too much fat is only half the problem of weight gain. "Then there is too little muscle," Dr. Westcott says.

Here's why: Muscles burn calories and keep people active, while fat is dead weight.

As people lose muscle through aging or inactivity, their metabolism slows, so they gain fat, become more sedentary, lose more muscle and gain more fat—an unhealthy repetitive cycle that impairs quality of life and leads to many health problems.

Restrictive dieting alone just prolongs the problem because you lose muscle along with fat. This slows down your metabolism and reduces your calorie needs. Soon, you have more fat and less muscle than before.

For permanent weight loss, "you need to restore your body to a healthier muscle-to-fat ratio," Dr. Westcott says. "You want to build more active muscle while you get rid of the fat."

Strength training breaks the cycle by replacing lost muscle tissue, which increases your metabolism. You burn more calories and fight fat even while you sleep.

Strength training workouts also burn lots of calories. A half-hour session with weights can easily consume more calories than a comparable period of moderate cycling, brisk walking or jogging. Plus, your body will continue to burn calories faster for up to two hours after a strength-training session.

"With more muscle and less fat, you'll naturally be more active, which will help you burn still more calories," says Dr. Westcott. "Slowly but surely, you'll work your way back to a more healthful weight."

Make sure that you talk to your health care provider before beginning any new exercise or strengthening program to be sure it's right for you.

Count the Benefits

Weight control is just one benefit of strength training. With a regular program, you can also:

- **Lose inches.** Muscles are more dense than fat, so they take up less space.
- **Protect bone density.** Strength training can maintain bone strength and increase bone-mineral density, helping to prevent osteoporosis.
- **Prevent or reduce lower back pain.** Well-conditioned muscles are better able to support the spine and cushion it against stress.
- **Avoid injury.** Stronger muscles guard against fatigue that can lead to injury.
- **Improve athletic performance.** You'll be able to perform better and be less fatigued.

"Weight loss and other benefits of strength training multiply when you add regular aerobic activities for endurance and eat a low-fat diet," Dr. Westcott says.

Easy Does It

You don't have to spend all day in a gym to benefit from strength training. Studies show you can see significant results with two or three half-hour sessions a week.

For starters, Dr. Westcott recommends a routine of about 15 different exercises that work all major muscle groups. Do one set of 10 repetitions of each exercise.

Use slow, controlled movements that follow through the full range of motion for each exercise. Gradually increase the number of reps or add another set. When you can do 12 reps in good form, you're ready to increase the weight a little—but no more than five percent at a time.

"Almost everyone can reap the benefits of strength training," Dr. Westcott says. "Whether you're in your teens or in your 90s, a small investment of time and effort can make a dramatic difference in how you feel and in the things you're able to do in your daily life."

