

HAPPY SIMPLE LIVING



*21 Ways To
Simplify Your Life*

By Eliza Cross



Hello!

I'm Eliza Cross, founder of the Happy Simple Living blog. I'm so glad you stopped by.

Perhaps you feel like your days are filled with too *much*: too many commitments, too much time spent taking care of a houseful of stuff, or too many things on a seemingly endless To Do list.

Maybe you long to make more space in your life for the things that really matter.

I totally get it. And while I don't pretend to have all the answers, I promise to share my best ideas for simplifying and helping you enjoy more time, creativity, joy and freedom.

Thank you for being here, and I look forward to exploring all the ways we can live simply and be happy.

Best always,

21 Ways to Simplify Your Life

1. Leave 10 Minutes Early

This simple tip will eliminate so much stress. Instead of doing what I used to do—scheduling everything down to the minute—the next time you need to be somewhere at a specific time, try leaving 10 minutes early. If you run into any unexpected snags, no problem. If you arrive early, you can relax, meditate, check email, or simply enjoy being early.

2. Singletask

Here's an experiment: The next time you clean the kitchen, focus on just that task. Take your time, and enjoy the process instead of rushing through it. Feel the simple joy of making a surface clean. Pat yourself on the back as you make things sparkle. Put your dishes away with gratitude for the meals they represent and the people in your life.

3. Underschedule

Build quiet nights and meeting-free days into your schedule. Make a deal that you'll never schedule two evening events in a row. Give yourself buffers. We never feel like we have enough time because we try to do too much. Be gentle with yourself. Make time for the things that really matter, and let yourself say 'Thank you, but I can't this time' so you have some balance and down time.

4. Unplug

Sometimes I have to disconnect from the digital world very deliberately. I put the phone up in my bedroom and mute it, for instance, so I can focus on the people I love. Or I close my laptop at five o'clock and don't open it until the morning. I never, ever regret spending less time online.

5. Write in a Gratitude Journal

Studies show that people who regularly write down the things for which they're thankful are happier. You might like to try a specific challenge, like writing three things at the end of the day. Or you can simply keep a journal handy to jot down things as they strike you. Reading back through all of the entries in my gratitude journal always brings me joy.

6. Whittle Down Your Stuff

Reducing clutter is a very satisfying process. The less stuff we have, the less we have to clean and maintain. If you have a lot of things, you might want to try 15 minutes a day for a month, and see what you accomplish. Keep at it, and eventually you'll notice that you're not spending as much time managing your stuff. Your spaces will feel lighter, and so will you.

7. Practice Dolce Far Niente

Oh, how I love this Italian phrase that loosely translates to “sweet doing nothing.” When was the last time you simply sat still? I challenge you to spend 15 minutes today or tomorrow doing absolutely nothing. Sit on a park bench and watch the kids play. Lay out in your back yard and watch the clouds overhead. When my children and I practice Dolce Far Niente on vacation, those are often our favorite moments. I'm willing to bet that if you do this exercise, it will bring you joy.

8. Floss Your Teeth

The simple act of flossing our choppers every day can protect us from diseases and cancers by reducing inflammation. Flossing keeps our teeth healthier, which reduces dental problems and the associated discomfort and expense. It makes our breath fresher, and the dental hygienist will compliment us when we go in for our twice-a-year cleaning. Best of all, flossing is practically free!

9. Step Outside

Studies have linked spending time outside to a reduction in depression, fatigue, blood pressure, and inflammation. In one study, participants who spent time in nature performed better on cognitive tests. Making an effort to spend more time in the great outdoors is an easy way to feel *so* much better.

10. Try Meditation

Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years, and according to research its health benefits include reduced stress, lower blood pressure and improved sleep. You don't need any equipment or special clothing for this simple practice. Find a comfortable place to sit and quiet your mind by taking a few deep breaths. Then, simply focus on your breath. When a thought drifts into your mind, just let the thought drift away and refocus on your breath. Each time you make that little turning back motion in your brain, you exercise a little muscle that will become stronger with practice. Even if you meditate for just 5 minutes a day, you can greatly improve your quality of life.

11. Replace Complaining with Joking

According to research, repeated complaining may cause or increase stress, deplete our energy and reduce our desire to pursue our dreams. On the other hand, a recent study by Loma Linda University in California reveals that the simple act of laughter can lower stress levels while increasing endorphins and mood-boosting dopamine. Try an experiment and go on a “Complaining Diet” for a day. Whenever something complaint-worthy happens, try to find the humor in it. Or read a funny article (Dave Barry’s columns always work for me) and have a good laugh.

12. Start Funding Your Emergency Account

Like death and taxes, another certainty for all of us is that mishaps will happen. Appliances will break, dental work will be needed, cars will stop running, and we will need ready cash for emergencies. To avoid charging an unplanned expense on a credit card, start funding your emergency account today. If you can, set up an automatic deposit so that the money can grow.

13. Try or Learn Something New

Research shows that learning new skills is good for our brains. Whether it’s finally acing your Macarena moves, twirling a basketball on your finger or folding a fitted sheet, trying new things can keep our neural pathways healthy and maybe even help prevent or delay dementia.

14. Eat More Colorful Foods

The foods that have the brightest colors generally have the highest concentrations of disease-fighting antioxidants. So enjoy those blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, watermelon, red and green peppers, dark leafy greens and other brightly-hued fruits and veggies. For more inspiration, check out the #eattherainbow hashtag on Instagram.

15. Take a Walk

A daily stroll can reduce depression, improve your sleep and even lengthen your life. According to a study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, depression sufferers who took a daily walk showed equal improvement in their symptoms as people who were given medication. In another study, researchers found that people who walked regularly enjoy longer and better quality of sleep. According to a Harvard School of Public Health study, participants who walked 150 minutes a week or more (about 22 minutes a day) lived between 2.7 and 4.7 years longer than those who didn’t walk.

16. Cook Double

When you're making something substantial like a casserole, homemade soup, enchiladas, lasagna, chicken or chili, it makes sense to cook a large batch and freeze half. You'll use the same number of dishes and utensils, your labor will only slightly increase, but you'll have the secure feeling that comes from having some delicious homemade meals waiting in the freezer.

17. Improve Your Sleep

If you wake up in the middle of the night and have a hard time falling back to sleep, here's an easy meditation that works wonders. Think of a two syllable word, or a two-word phrase that you associate with restfulness. It could be "comfort," "Jesus," "deep sleep," "holy," "peaceful," "good rest" or any word or phrase that is meaningful to you. Get very comfortable in your bed, lay your head on your pillow, inhale deeply and say the first syllable or part of the word in your mind. As you breathe out, say the second syllable or word. Try to do this twenty consecutive times. If a thought comes into your mind, just acknowledge it and then let it float away.

18. Say a Prayer

Could you use a hand from the divine? Whether it's a petition for help or a grateful 'thank you' for a blessing, the act of prayer connects us with God, gives us strength and helps us worry less. According to a study by Centra State Hospital, "the psychological benefits of prayer may help reduce stress and anxiety, and promote a more positive outlook." Prayers have even been shown to improve the recovery time of surgical patients.

19. Swish and Swipe

I love this phrase, which comes from the FlyLady. It refers to the act of regularly maintaining a space so it stays clean. We might wipe the sink and counter whenever we pass through the kitchen, or give the bathroom mirror a quick shine. By doing small acts of maintenance, we can keep spaces nice and reduce drudgery.

20. Challenge and Question Negative Thoughts

When it comes to self-talk, research indicates that asking ourselves questions rather than repeating affirmations is a more effective way to create change. Let's say my brain thinks, "This hike is too hard. You'll never make it to the top." I might respond with thoughts like, "Have I successfully pushed myself in the past? I have! Haven't I been walking every day? I feel good and strong." This practice is especially important when we want to reach a positive goal.

21. Create a Peaceful Bedroom

Something about mess and clutter makes it hard to feel truly relaxed when we're ready to go to sleep. Make your bedroom your personal oasis, and keep it dusted, vacuumed and clutter-free. Try not to spray hairspray or heavy cologne in the room. A pair of organic cotton pillowcases will lower your exposure to the insecticides and pesticides that are used to grow conventional cotton. Wash your bed linens with unscented, eco-friendly detergent, and hang your sheets in the sunshine to dry if you're able. Before bedtime, take a few minutes to hang up clothes and put things away, and you'll awaken to a nice, clean space. *Ahhh...*



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