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25 Great Ways to Make Your Life Easier

Helpful hacks to simplify your today — and a few that will benefit your tomorrow

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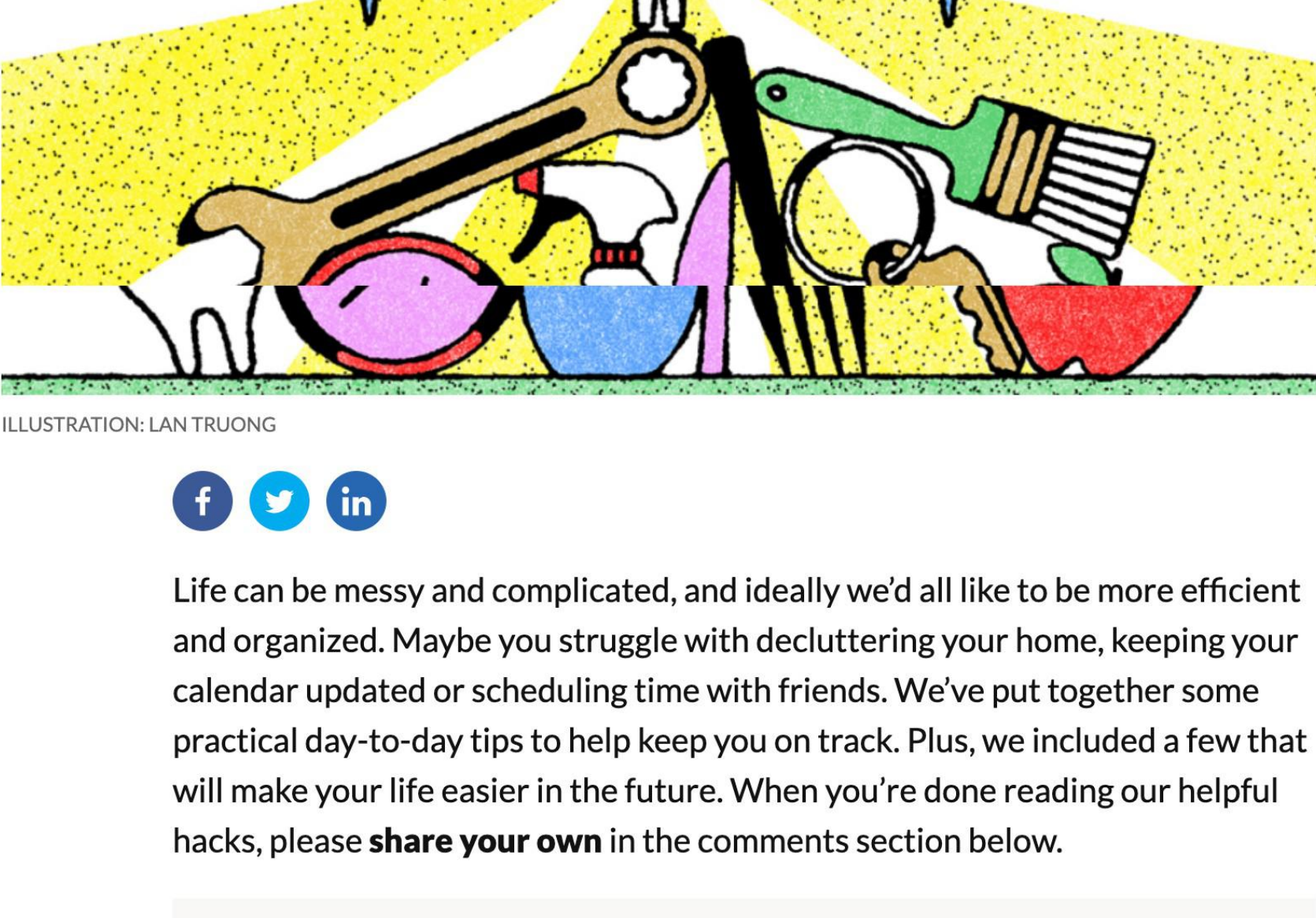
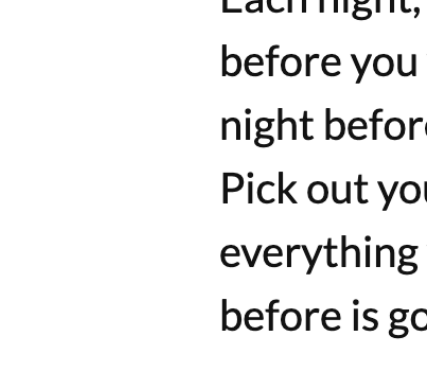


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Life can be messy and complicated, and ideally we'd all like to be more efficient and organized. Maybe you struggle with decluttering your home, keeping your calendar updated or scheduling time with friends. We've put together some practical day-to-day tips to help keep you on track. Plus, we included a few that will make your life easier in the future. When you're done reading our helpful hacks, please **share your own** in the comments section below.



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1. Start your morning the evening before

Hectic days often start with hectic mornings. To make mornings smoother, start them the night before, suggests professional organizer Lindsey Mahanna, owner of Clutter to Clarity Home Organizing in Randolph, New Jersey. Premeasure your coffee for the week and set it aside in filters, ready to go. Each night, put a coffee-filled filter in the coffee maker and program it to brew before you wake up. This also works for smoothies — prep the ingredients the night before — or lunches: If you're working, pack your lunch ahead of time. Pick out your outfit, set out your shoes. Make sure your bag or purse has everything you need and keys are ready to go. "Anything you can do the night before is going to make the next day easier," Mahanna says.

2. Organize "like with like"

When it comes to saving time and simplifying tasks, even a small effort at home organization can make a big difference, according to professional organizer Stacey Agin Murray, owner of Organized Artistry in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. To get a handle on your possessions, she recommends arranging similar items together. "Grouping all baking products together in your cabinet helps you to know if you're missing ingredients for your favorite cake," Agin Murray says. "Grouping 'like with like' in your clothing closet saves you time and energy getting dressed in the morning. If you're struggling to get organized... you'll soon notice how easy it is to find what you need when you need it." You can get as specific as you want — it might make sense to split your closet by season, or all short-sleeved shirts together, all T-shirts together, etc. If you don't have a place for everything, you'll need to create it. Every item in your home must have a home — and if you don't have room, declutter to create it.

3. Rethink your workspaces

Store things where they're actually needed, notes professional organizer and decorator Bonnie Borromeo Tomlinson, author of *Stop Buying Bins & Other Blunt But Practical Advice From a Home Organizer*. "Coffee mugs near the coffee maker. Hand towels near the sink. These might be obvious ones, but how many of you have your trash can positioned several feet away from your workstation, guaranteeing you will get debris on the floor moving from one location to the other? Moving it closer to where you need it creates less mess, time and effort," she says.

4. Declutter regularly

Tackling clutter can feel overwhelming, so make it a routine and bite-size task, suggests professional organizer Elsa Elbert, founder and CEO of Composed Living, a Los Angeles–based organizing company. "Set time each week to declutter one small space in your home," she says. "I recommend starting with a medicine cabinet or one category of clothing, such as coats. If you devote 15 minutes each week to eliminating items you no longer need, your home will look and feel wonderful in no time." Also: Read our [Smart Guide to Decluttering](#) for tips on getting rid of what you don't need.

5. Free up phone space

"Regularly declutter your digital devices, organizing files and deleting unnecessary apps and emails," says time strategist and productivity consultant Jaimee Campanella of The Jaimee Campanella Company. "This not only frees up storage space, but also improves digital productivity and reduces distractions." Digital photos, in particular, have a tendency to clog your phone's arteries. "A quick and fun way to declutter those is to open the photos app each morning and type in today's date without the year," Elbert says. "You will enjoy seeing the memories, and also can delete any duplicates or photos that aren't necessary at the same time. At the end of the year, you'll be left only with photos you love, and more storage space on your phone."

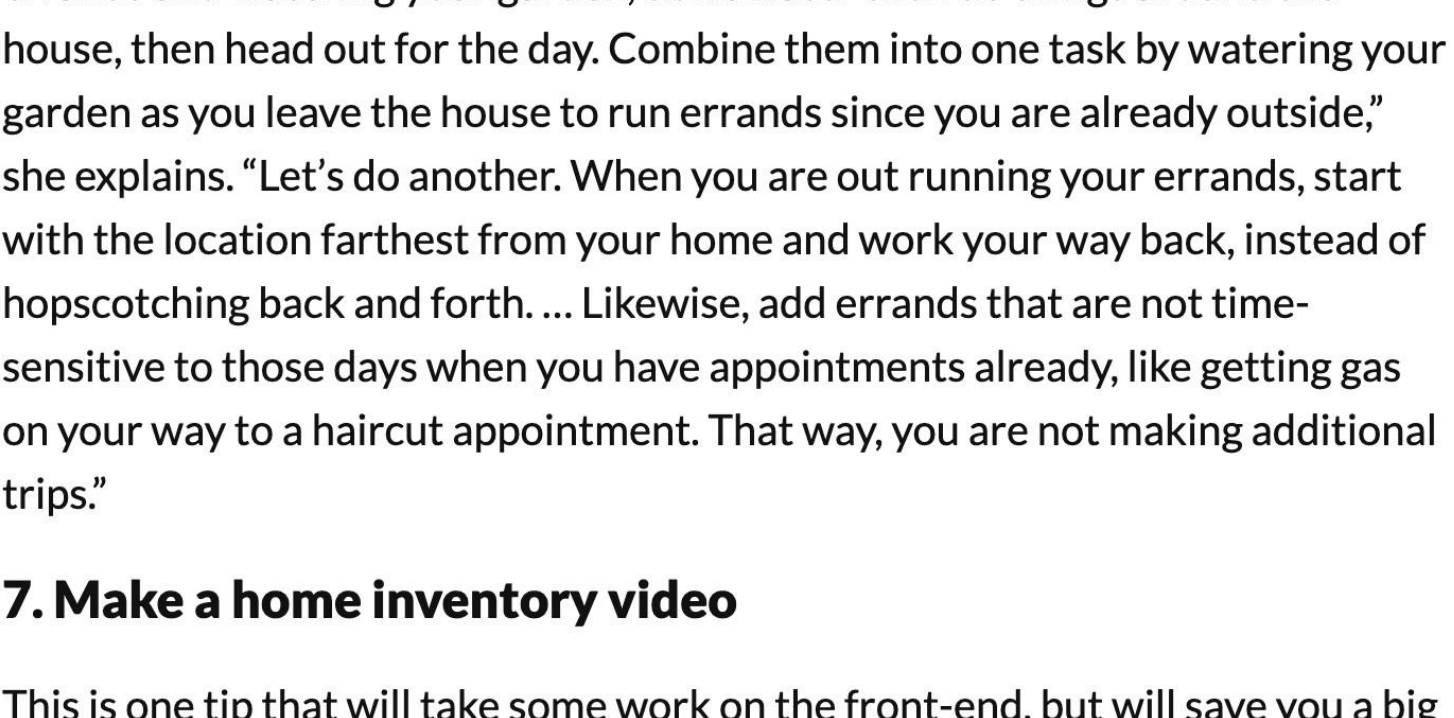


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6. Be strategic about chores and errands

You can complete routine household chores and errands easier and faster by being more strategic, says Borromeo Tomlinson, who suggests taking your to-do list and reordering it for maximum efficiency. "If your day includes running errands and watering your garden, don't water then do things around the house, then head out for the day. Combine them into one task by watering your garden as you leave the house to run errands since you are already outside," she explains. "Let's do another. When you are out running your errands, start with the location farthest from your home and work your way back, instead of hopscooting back and forth.... Likewise, add errands that are not time-sensitive to those days when you have appointments already, like getting gas on your way to a haircut appointment. That way, you are not making additional trips."

7. Make a home inventory video

This is one tip that will take some work on the front-end, but will save you a big headache down the road. Once a year, walk through your home with your smartphone in hand and take video and photos of all your belongings, getting close enough to identify brands, models and serial numbers. Do this for both inside and outside your home — including the attic, garage, basement and shed. Doing so could save you a lot of time and money down the road in case household items are damaged or stolen. If that happens and you file a claim, your homeowners insurance policy will ask for a contents coverage, or a list of all items destroyed. This includes appliances, furniture, clothing, valuables, toys, electronics and tools. The amount covered typically is between 50 to 70 percent based on your policy, but could be higher depending on your situation. An extra step is to keep a record in your safe with receipts for high-dollar items. "Include all home systems, including HVAC heating and cooling units, hot water tanks and generators. These are often overlooked as many people don't consider them personal property," notes contractor Jay Sanders, owner of Castle Dream Construction, a home remodeling company in Baltimore, Maryland. Without an updated list, your insurance settlement will take a lot more time and not be nearly as accurate. If you want to lean on technology to make it more straightforward, there are a number of home inventory apps, including Sortly, Nest Egg and Encircle.

8. Hire a handyman to head off home hassles

Anyone who's ever had a flooded basement or a broken furnace knows how complicated and time-consuming home-related headaches can be. An easy way to avoid them — and the life-altering chaos that ensues — is to hire a handyman at least once per year to help make your life run smoother," Sanders says. "Your handyman can check your homes' filters; look for faulty hookups, wiring or plumbing; and they can help fix things that could be a bigger issue down the road."

9. Install a dashcam

The next time you check in with your insurance agent to inquire about lowering costs, ask about dash cameras. Although most companies may not offer a discount for having a dash camera, it may save you money on a future claim. These devices, often called dashcams, record and save road activity in and outside of your vehicle. If you get into an accident or incident, footage from the camera can be sent to your insurance company to help resolve claims or accidents where fault is disputed. They also could help in claims that include vandalism and car theft. Many models can be installed without needing a second person or professional help, so select a model that you like based on your preferences.

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10. Keep track using trackers

GPS or Bluetooth trackers — little devices that attach to just about anything and signal their location via a phone app — can be used to monitor luggage while you travel, find a runaway pet and even help you remember where you parked your car. And trackers such as an Air Tag, Tile or Chipolo ONE Spot cost \$30 or less. When a Bluetooth tracker is in range, it communicates directly with your phone.

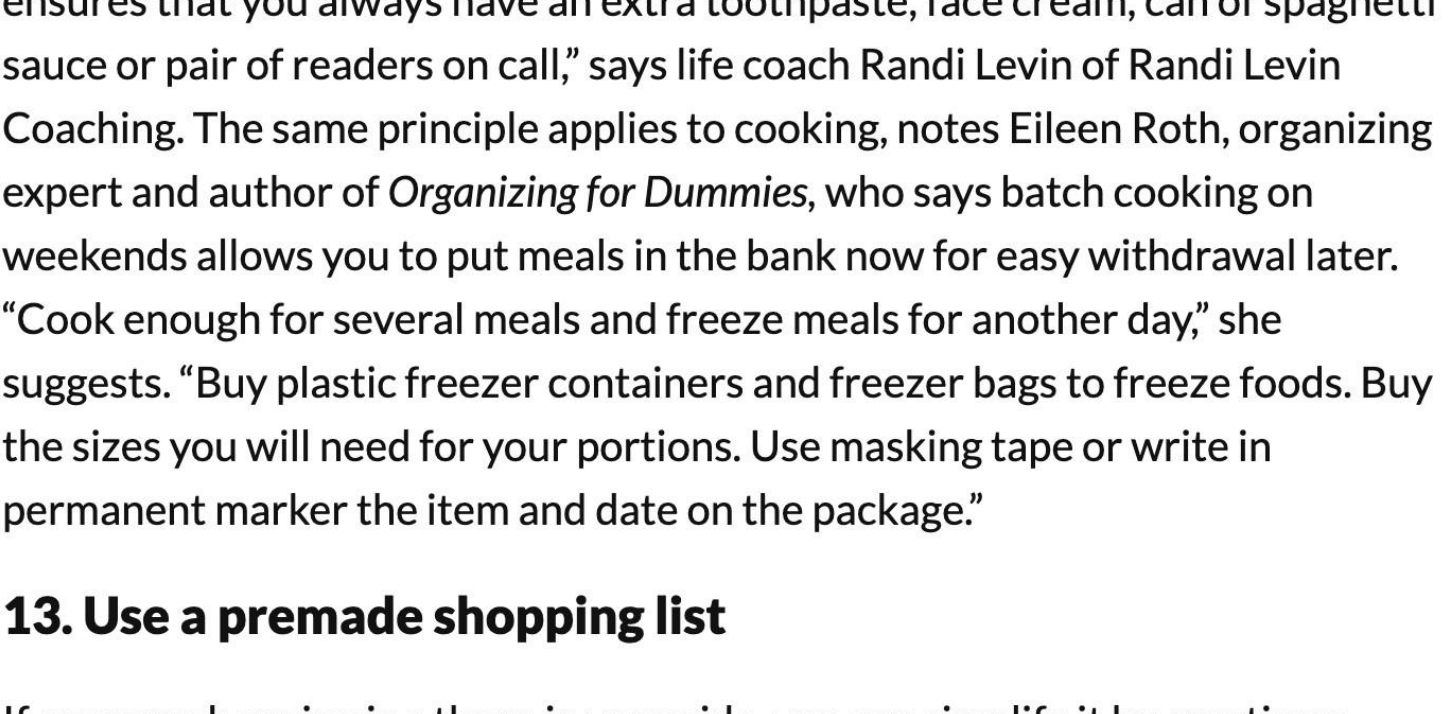


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11. Subscribe to essentials instead of shopping for them

Amazon's Subscribe & Save service can be a major time-saver by allowing you to "set and forget" orders for paper towels, laundry detergent, bottled water and other essentials. "It's great for things you need on a regular basis, because you can have them routinely delivered to your door and make fewer trips to the store. You don't have to think about it," says Mahanna, who also is a fan of subscription-based purchases from online pet retailer Chewy. "It's especially great for things that are heavy or cumbersome like pet food and kitty litter, because it's easier to have those things delivered than trying to get them into your cart at the store, then into your car and then into your house." Other options include Grove Collaborative, which delivers Earth-friendly cleaning and household products ButcherBox, which delivers high-quality meat and seafood; and either Dollar Shave Club (for men) or Athena Club (for women) for body and shave products. To see if you'll actually save money, do the math for how much you'll need and use, and compare that to buying these products as you run out.

12. Buy and cook in bulk

You already know that buying in bulk saves money and time. "Creating a one-to-use and one-for-next time stockpile of your favorite nonperishable items ensures that you always have an extra toothpaste, face cream, can of spaghetti sauce or pair of readers on call," says life coach Randi Levin of Randi Levin Coaching. The same principle applies to cooking, notes Eileen Roth, organizing expert and author of *Organizing for Dummies*, who says batch cooking on weekends allows you to put meals in the bank now for easy withdrawal later. "Cook enough for several meals and freeze meals for another day," she suggests. "Buy plastic freezer containers and freezer bags to freeze foods. Buy the sizes you will need for your portions. Use masking tape or write in permanent marker the item and date on the package."

13. Use a premade shopping list

If grocery shopping is a thorn in your side, you can simplify it by creating a master shopping list of all the items you buy on a regular basis and using that as a template for your weekly trips to the store, says organizing coach Sherri Curley of The Practical Sort in Portland, Oregon. All you have to do is print the list, post it on your fridge, check off the items you need as they run out, then shop. "Mine just happens to be organized by aisle, so it's really easy and super-efficient. I can whip in and out of the grocery store because I know exactly what I need and exactly where it is," says Curley, who also has ready-made templates for other routine tasks, like packing for a trip. "There's less chance of forgetting something, and it's less stressful."

14. Consolidate bank accounts

Make your financial life easier by reducing the number of accounts you have, says Certified Financial Planner Darren Colananni, a wealth management advisor at Centurion Wealth Management in McLean, Virginia. "If you have multiple bank accounts, a few retirement accounts and different credit cards, then you need to keep track of everything. More than likely, you think you are doing a good job of tracking, but chances are you are spending more than you should, missing investment opportunities and/or don't have a great handle on your finances," explains Colananni, who suggests going through your accounts and seeing if there are opportunities to close old accounts and/or consolidate accounts that you don't keep a regular eye on.

15. Automate your finances

Consolidation goes hand-in-hand with automation. Colananni suggests using online banking to schedule regular and automatic contributions to savings, investment and retirement accounts. "Almost every financial institution allows this. You'll be surprised how much money you can save and invest just by doing this," he says. "Do the same thing for your mortgage, car loans, credit cards bills, etc. There is always a time or two that we are on vacation or forget to pay the bills on time, and then we are hit with a late fee. Set up all of your debts to be paid automatically each month."

16. Invest in index funds

A particularly complicated and time-consuming aspect of financial management is investing. To make it easier, stop chasing individual stocks and start investing in a low-fee, diversified equity index fund, suggests Robert R. Johnson, professor of finance at Creighton University and coauthor of *The Tools & Techniques of Investment Planning, Strategic Value Investing and Investment Banking for Dummies*. He recommends something called dollar-cost averaging. "Dollar-cost averaging is a simple technique that entails investing a fixed amount of money in the same fund or stock at regular intervals over a long period of time," explains Johnson, who says trying to pick winners in the stock market is, for most people, a losing game.

17. Schedule friend time

Being intentional about social interactions to ensure that friendships enhance your life instead of complicating it, according to psychologist and friendship expert Irene S. Levine, coproducer of the *Friendship Rules* newsletter on Substack. "Even when friends are eager to get together, finding a mutually convenient time can be challenging.... So pencil in a regular weekly or monthly lunch or dinner with a friend on your calendar," says Levine, who recommends combining a fun errand with friend time. "Go to the farmers market with your friend on Saturday mornings, plan to meet at the gym or schedule your nail appointments simultaneously." And when you meet up, schedule your next interaction before you both leave, says connection and friendship expert Jewel Hohman of Jewel Hohman Coaching. "A lot of people get lost in the logistical struggle of messaging back and forth to find a time to get together," she explains. "When you do get together, it is much easier to plan the next hangout before you part ways."

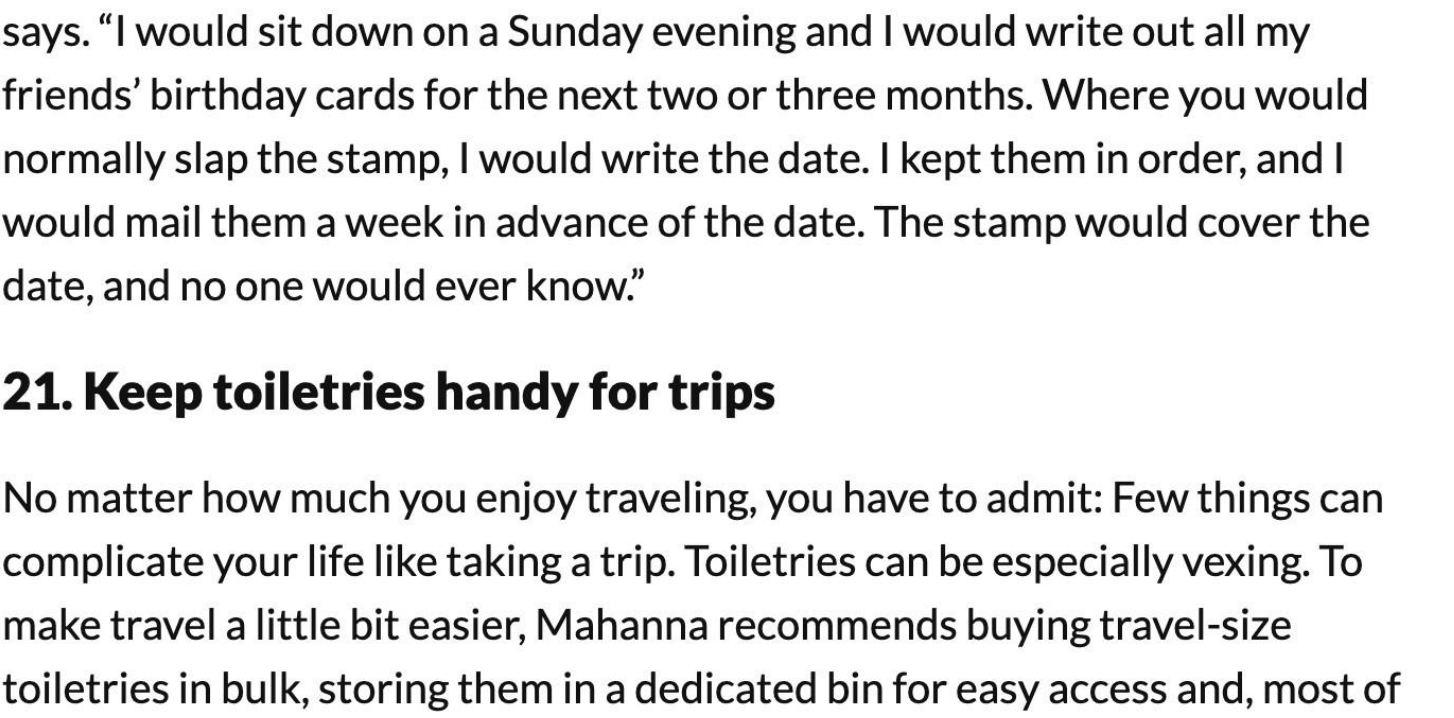


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18. Preschedule appointments

"When leaving a doctor's office, a hair or nail salon, or a massage appointment, go ahead and schedule your next appointment," notes Levine. "That way you have it on your calendar as a meeting, you don't have to remember to call for an appointment at a certain date and you get the timing you desire," she says. You can go even further by "front-loading" appointment making — scheduling all necessary appointments for the year at one time, Campanella suggests. "This allows for better planning and coordination, ensuring that important health and personal care appointments are not overlooked," she says. "Alternatively, dedicating a specific day each month to make appointments can also be helpful. By grouping these tasks together, you streamline the process and minimize the effort required throughout the year."



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19. Keep cards and gifts ready to go

Birthdays and anniversaries are supposed to be joyful. When you're trying to remember them, however, they can be stressful. That's why Mahanna buys greeting cards in bulk and stores them with stamps in a greeting card organizer. You can buy a purpose-built organizer online, or just use a simple accordion file. "Sometimes they're organized by month, but I like to organize mine by type of card because there are some things you can't plan for," Mahanna says. "For example, you know when a birthday's coming up, but you don't know when someone is going to lose a loved one. So I like to keep extra sympathy cards on hand. That way, you don't have to rush to the store if you need a card, or go out if the weather's bad." She also keeps a few spare gift cards on hand to give as last-minute gifts when she doesn't have time to shop. You could just as easily maintain a stash of evergreen gifts, like nice dish towels or scented candles.

20. Write birthday cards in advance

If you really want to save yourself time and effort, don't just buy cards in advance. Write them, too, suggests Mary Jo Contella, a professional organizer with Organized by MJ, who says you can premake cards for a month, a quarter or even an entire year. "This is something I used to do for a very long time," she says. "I would sit down on a Sunday evening and I would write out all my friends' birthday cards for the next two or three months. Where you would normally slap the stamp, I would write the date. I kept them in order, and I would mail them a week in advance of the date. The stamp would cover the date, and no one would ever know."

21. Keep toiletries handy for trips

No matter how much you enjoy traveling, you have to admit: Few things can complicate your life like taking a trip. Toiletries can be especially vexing. To make travel a little bit easier, Mahanna recommends buying travel-size toiletries in bulk, storing them in a dedicated bin for easy access and, most of all, keeping your toiletry bag packed at all times. "I have everything I need in there — shampoo, deodorant, a toothbrush, a razor — and I keep it stocked. When I get home from a trip, I refill whatever I need to refill so that I don't open it before my next trip and suddenly realize that I need to get toothpaste," she says. "When everything is ready to go, that means I can just throw it in my suitcase and walk out the door."

22. Set alarms for routine tasks

There are many mobile apps available that you can download to make your life easier. One that you might already have on your smartphone, however, is a reminder app, which keeps track of things you need to do on a daily, weekly, monthly or even annual basis. Examples include Apple's Reminders for iPhone, PI Reminder for Android and Microsoft To Do, which is available for both iPhone and Android devices. All three are free. "I don't have a great working memory, so I use the Reminders app and alarms on my phone for all different types of reminders — paying bills, birthdays, watering the garden, planting bulbs in the fall, moving the laundry from the washer to the dryer, taking the meat out of the freezer to thaw," Mahanna says.



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23. Outsource undesirable tasks

Time is money. If you're willing to pay for more of it, outsourcing can be a great solution, according to Campanella. "By offloading nonessential tasks, you create space for activities that align with your priorities and values," she says. Along with housecleaning, lawn care, grocery shopping, meal preparation and home organization, you can use a service like Thumbtack, TaskRabbit, Amazon Mechanical Turk or Wonolo to outsource cumbersome jobs such as mounting a TV, assembling furniture, lifting heavy objects, hanging holiday lights or even waiting in line. If you're not sure where to start, lean on technology. Apps like [AARP's HomeFit AI](#) use augmented reality to identify the design elements and appliances such as refrigerators, sinks and stairs, and creates a checklist of do-it-yourself tasks and those that are best completed by a hired professional.

24. Stop procrastinating

Procrastination is the enemy of productivity. To nip it in the bud, try the Pomodoro Technique. Created in the 1980s by then-university student Francesco Cirillo, the idea is simple: Pick a complex or tedious task you've been putting off — for example, organizing family photos, deep-cleaning your kitchen, weeding your garden or researching your family tree — then set a timer for 25 minutes. You can use a kitchen timer or the timer on your phone. Focus on a single task until the timer rings, then take a 5-minute break. Repeat. After four cycles, or "Pomodoros," take a longer break of up to 30 minutes. "Concentration and consciousness lead to speed, one Pomodoro at a time," Cirillo says in his book, *The Pomodoro Technique*.

25. Decide to decide

It's easy to feel paralyzed by all the small decisions you have to make on a daily basis. Designate a predetermined time each week for a "decision spree," suggests decision coach Nell Wulfhart. "Sit down with a stack of Post-its, and on each one write a decision you've been trying to make. These can be anything from what present to buy for your niece's wedding gift to what new hobby to take up to whether to renovate that bathroom. Now set a timer for 10 minutes, and just go through the stack and make each decision," Wulfhart says. "I promise the quality of the decisions will be just as good as if you'd continued to wonder and worry for the next few weeks and months, and you'll get all that time back."

BONUS TIP: 26. Get your advance directives in place early

This tip makes life a lot easier on your loved ones. Advance directives are legal documents that provide instructions for your preferred medical care and go into effect if you aren't able to communicate your own wishes. These documents include a living will (or instruction directive) and a durable health care power of attorney (or health care proxy). Although it can be uncomfortable to think about, having these in place can save a lot of hand-wringing in the future and ensure that your decisions are honored. You should also appoint someone who can speak for you to make sure your wishes are carried out. [AARP has a database](#) linking to each state for more information on what paperwork you'll need.

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Matt Alderton has written about everything from classic cars and climate change to farming robots and fighter jets for publications such as USA Today, The Washington Post and Forbes. Originally from Denver, which boasts 300 days of sunshine a year, he now resides in Chicago, which boasts three. You can reach him on his website, [MattAlderton.com](#).

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