

6^{Morning} *Protocols*

to build a better life



A Daily Plan for Feeling More Positive, and Less Negative.



Most people don't wake up asking, "How can I get happier today?" Instead, the question is usually closer to, "How can I stop feeling so crummy?" Perhaps you know the feeling: the alarm goes off, and before you're even out of bed, the heaviness sets in. Your stress lingers from yesterday. Restless sleep fogs your focus. You have a quiet sense that today will be another uphill climb.

Your mornings—whether chipper or gloomy—set the tone for your day. A rough start ripples outward: it drains your focus, shortens your patience with the people you love, and makes even small tasks feel harder. By mid-morning, it feels like you're already behind.

Science shows us why. Positive and negative emotions come from different regions of the brain, which means they don't rise and fall together. Put another way, you must know whether your problem is a lack of positive emotions or too many negative emotions. For those of us who struggle with mornings, the problem is often the latter (and sometimes both). That's why the real challenge for many people isn't simply to "be happier" — it's learning how to feel less unhappy.

That's where this guide comes in. These **6 Protocols** are designed to help you rebalance your mornings—lowering negative emotions, raising positive ones, and giving you back clarity, steadiness, and energy to face the day on your own terms.



Experience the Brāhma Muhurta

Why this matters:

Many people feel their heaviest negative emotions in the morning: stress, anxiety, or irritability right after waking. Starting your morning earlier than usual can give you a calmer, more intentional entry into the day.

What to do:

Wake up before sunrise (if you want to be traditional, try to rise precisely 1h 36m before sunrise, known as Brāhma Muhurta, or “the creator’s time”, in Hindu practice). At minimum, step outside or sit by a window to watch the rising sun.

Why it works:

Early rising improves attentiveness and recall. Exposure to natural light raises mood and balances circadian rhythm. Training yourself toward a “morning-lark” schedule reduces negative affect, on average.





Your Practice

If the thought of waking at 4:30 am fills you with dread, start small: Try waking just 20–30 minutes earlier than usual. Step outside or open a window to notice the light. Work your way up to the 1 hour 36 minutes mark if possible.

Set alarm for:

Record how you feel before, during, and after sunrise.
What shifts, if any, can you feel?

Get Physical



Why this matters:

If mornings leave you tense, foggy, or restless, movement is the fastest way to reset your mood. Exercise changes brain chemistry in ways that help you feel lighter and clearer.

What to do:

Dedicate 30–60 minutes to morning movement. Combine resistance (weights, bodyweight) + cardio (Zone 2 = breathing heavily but able to talk).

Why it works:

Vigorous exercise increases hippocampal volume (which is linked to mood regulation). It boosts endorphins and reduces depressive symptoms. You will enjoy these physiological and neurobiological benefits when you feel the heaviest emotionally—such as the morning. Your first lift won't feel pleasant, but as your workout continues, your mood will improve.





Your Practice

Choose movement that fits your lifestyle. Even 15 minutes of stretching, bodyweight exercise, or a brisk walk can shift your mood. The idea is to build up to what is comfortable and sustainable for you. Make 30–60 minutes your goal.

Morning Movement (minutes):

Do you feel better, or less heavy, after this?

Get Metaphysical

Why this matters:

Emotional self-management benefits from stillness as well. Without this, mornings can feel chaotic or overwhelming.



What to do:

Spend 20–30 minutes in prayer, meditation, or reflection. If religious, this may be a prayer or a morning mass. If not, choose a simple meditation or breathing practice.

Why it works:

Prayer and meditation lower negative mood, calm the nervous system, and strengthen emotional regulation pathways. Even a short daily practice can reduce stress and increase resilience.





Your Practice

This doesn't need to be religious; try any form of reflection. Consider prayer, meditation, journaling, or quiet breathing. What matters is finding time for consistent focus and grounding. The goal: Think about yourself less by making yourself small in the grand scheme of things. This is intensely liberating.

Prayer or Meditation Type:

Duration (minutes):

Has taking this time shifted your focus for the better?

The Magic Bean



Why this matters:

Reaching for coffee first thing can set you up for a midday crash. Timing your caffeine intake makes it a tool for energy and mood, not a crutch.

What to do:

Delay your first coffee until 90+ minutes after waking. Pair it with your first meal.

Why it works:

Contrary to popular wisdom, caffeine doesn't wake you up—it prevents you from feeling drowsy. For the first 90 minutes of the day, our heads are filled with the chemical adenosine, which makes us feel tired. But when we consume caffeine first thing in the morning, it blocks adenosine receptors, which means adenosine lingers inside our heads. When caffeine leaves our system (say, in the mid-afternoon) we crash, because the lingering adenosine can finally fill its receptors. The point—wait 90 minutes before consuming your first cup, which will let the adenosine flush from your system. This way, you'll get all of the benefits—and none of the costs—from caffeine.





Your Practice

Experiment with timing. If you usually drink coffee first thing, try delaying 60–90 minutes. Notice if your energy lasts longer.

Today I woke up at:

Had my first coffee at:

Did you feel different by changing the time of your caffeine intake?

Tryptophan Time

Why this matters:

Sugary breakfasts may comfort in the moment, but they spike and crash your energy and mood. Starting with protein helps stabilize emotions throughout the day.



What to do:

Build your first meal around protein-rich foods (for example, Greek yogurt, whey protein, nuts, eggs, lean meats). Aim for 30–40 grams of protein at breakfast.

Why it works:

Protein high in tryptophan raises serotonin activity, which has been shown to calm the mood. Moreover, it supports muscle maintenance and energy stability throughout the day.





Your Practice

Swap a carb-heavy breakfast for a protein-rich option. You'll no doubt notice a shift in how it affects your mood and focus.

First Protein Source:

Second Protein Source:

Did you feel different? How did your energy change?

Get into the Flow

Why this matters:



Unstructured mornings can lead to distraction and stress. After you have completed the above steps, finish your morning with deep, uninterrupted creative work. This will give you focus and control before the day's demands pile up.

What to do:

Block your first 2–4 hours for creative or focused work (writing, planning, problem-solving). Avoid meetings, emails, or calls until later.

Why it works:

Flow state (full absorption in meaningful work) raises positive mood and lowers negative mood. The first five protocols (early rising, exercise, prayer, caffeine, protein) will place you in the ideal headspace for the flow state to materialize.





Your Practice

Protect even 30–60 minutes in the morning for uninterrupted focus (writing, creating, problem-solving). 2–4 hours is a goal to work towards.

Deep Work Block (minutes):

Project Focus:

Did you find it easy to achieve flow state?

What could improve next time? What dragged you out of the flow state?

These **six protocols** have transformed my mornings, and, in turn, my life. They weren't something I figured out at 30; they came only after lots of **study, research, and experience**. But the beauty of sharing them with you now is that you don't have to wait to begin.

Your **challenges** may not look exactly like mine. Your mornings, your emotions, your obstacles, they're **uniquely** yours. That's why this isn't about copying my routine step by step. It's about using these protocols as a **starting point**, then **adapting, experimenting**, and noticing what works **best for you**.

Think of yourself as the **scientist** in your own life. Adjust the levers, keep track of what changes, and pay attention to how your mood shifts. Over time, **small experiments** add up to **profound improvements**. If you commit to the process, I predict you'll find your mornings lighter, your days steadier, and your well-being stronger.



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On my website, you'll find a quiz that measures your positive and negative affect (PANAS) profile. It helps you understand your natural happiness blend, and play to your strengths. Take the quiz to learn your profile.

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POET, MAD SCIENTIST, OR
JUDGE?

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play to your strengths. Take this quiz to learn
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