

The AAP-CA2 Newsletter Committee asked the following question to readers in winter 2020: *The days are getting shorter, but the work hours seem to be getting longer. What do you do to stay balanced during the busy winter respiratory season?* Now, as daylight savings time ends in 2022, we asked Dr. Ruiz to share an updated response two years later. Please enjoy.

### **The Long Days of Winter**

Melissa Ruiz, MD, FAAP

I'm a morning person, so the earlier sunshine is just what the doctor ordered for my early mornings! Getting up and exercising helps me start my day with more positive energy and gives me the patience to work with my partner to get our three boys ready and get them where they need to be.

I started a 5-minute journal in late March 2020 because I needed a new approach to my days. Every day felt unpredictable, and I felt a very distinct loss of control. I had stopped using it over the last year, but after this year's AAP NCE plenary on "Reclaiming Your Joy," I realized how much I missed this practice. This journal is a very specific exercise that allows me to focus on my state of mind in the morning (tired, excited, drained, grumpy, etc.). It forces me to consider what is in my control to affect and where I want to be that day. Recognizing my role in choosing how I react to challenges in my day really helps me through those plot-twist moments of which there are currently SO MANY. I write what I am grateful for: the sun shining into my room, a warm home, a healthy family, a snoring dog, sleeping in, etc., and then I am asked to express what will make my day great. This is where I get to look forward to the highlights of my day. If I have something discrete planned that I have been looking forward to - dinner with a friend or a date with my husband or with one of our boys - I write that. But sometimes it is simply "snuggles and giggles with my boys," "good conversation during dinner," or "taking a nap".

A few months into this process back in 2020, I realized that I had been doing some of this work but had never written it down. I have always planned my days and weeks in my head. With my "go-go-go personality" and my attitude of saying "yes" to most new opportunities, I am often juggling many plates. During my mental planning, I often made it a point to "circle in red" those potential highlights of my day or week. This is particularly helpful during the seemingly endless long winter clinic days or those moments with patients where I feel I have nothing to offer besides an empathetic ear. The intentionality of starting my day with this practice has absolutely bolstered me during the rollercoaster of the last few years. I fall out of the habit for a few days to a few weeks, but if I notice my mood declining, or any of my boys point out my grumpiness, I know it is time to start up again. Who knew a simple 5-minute journal could be a game changer?



**Melissa J Ruiz, MD, MPH** is a general pediatrician in an FQHC in Ventura, CA. She is the mother of three incredible, silly, and kind boys who can always make her laugh. She has a special interest in caring for children with special needs, children in foster care, and children from immigrant families.