

The AAP-CA2 Newsletter Committee asked the following question to readers. Please consider submitting your response to share with the membership. -- *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?*

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 much more positive energy and gives me the patience to work with my partner to get our three boys ready and two of them to where they need to be. These days, that is constantly changing and that has been challenging for our two full-time working parent family.

I started a 5-minute journal sometime 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. This journal is a very explicit 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 actually 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 - a socially distanced walk with a friend or a pandemic bubble family dinner - I write that. But sometimes it is simply "snuggles and giggles with my boys," "good conversation during dinner," or "getting a run in during lunch."

A few months into this process, I realized that I had actually been doing some of this work already 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, as many of us are. 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 this rollercoaster. I fall out of the habit for a few days to a few weeks, but if I notice my mood downtrending or my 7-year-old points 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.