NEWS LESSON

Can You Put a Good Day on a Timetable?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What small thing can rescue an ordinary day?
2. Would your ideal day have more plans or more empty space?
3. Does knowing what makes you happy make it easier to do?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**interpretable**	☐	A	connections between two things
2	**respondents**	☐	B	something that gets in your way and makes progress difficult
3	**associations**	☐	C	people who answer the questions in a survey
4	**obstacle**	☐	D	moving up or down through a page on a screen
5	**texture**	☐	E	a quiet person who gains energy from being alone
6	**scrolling**	☐	F	the feel or quality of something, made up of its small details
7	**extrovert**	☐	G	able to be understood and explained
8	**introvert**	☐	H	an outgoing person who gains energy from other people

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A 2026 American study analysed more than 15,000 reported days and over a hundred activities. It found patterns, not a timetable that guarantees a good day.

1 Suppose you were given an entirely free day and asked to arrange it for maximum happiness. Coffee with friends, a satisfying stretch of work and some exercise might come to mind, though someone else would choose a slow breakfast and a long afternoon reading. Researchers have wondered whether broader patterns lie beneath these preferences. A 2026 American study used large-scale survey data to ask what separates an unusually good day from an ordinary one.

2 The team examined the 2013 and 2021 American Time Use Surveys, which together included more than 15,000 respondents. Participants recorded their daily activities and indicated whether the day felt better than typical. Using interpretable machine-learning models, the researchers investigated more than one hundred activities and the ways their duration related to reported wellbeing. The result was not a miraculous timetable but a set of statistical associations suggesting that some arrangements of daily life are more commonly linked with positive experiences than others.

3 Social contact proved especially influential. Spending time with other people was strongly associated with a better-than-usual day, though the relationship appeared to level off after around two hours. Work followed a different pattern: up to six hours did not clearly undermine the likelihood of a good day, but longer stretches were associated with a sharper decline. These findings suggest that neither constant socialising nor total avoidance of work is necessarily the answer. A satisfying day may depend on a varied rhythm rather than a single activity taken to extremes.

4 The Guardian subsequently invited three writers to experiment with routines inspired by the research. Their attempts highlighted a familiar obstacle: most adults cannot simply redesign their days around a scientific ideal. Caring responsibilities, unpredictable schedules and financial pressures limit the freedom to choose. The study also relied on associations, not controlled experiments showing cause and effect. Someone may see friends because they already feel good. Another person may have time to spare because their life is less pressured. A pattern in a survey is not a timetable that guarantees happiness.

5 There is also a danger in treating happiness as another project to optimise. If every hour must be productive, sociable or restorative, even leisure can become a source of pressure. The pleasure of an unplanned conversation or a quiet afternoon may disappear when we measure it against a checklist. Personality matters too: an extrovert's ideal evening may leave an introvert drained. The research offers population-level clues, not instructions that can be applied indiscriminately to every individual.

6 Nevertheless, the findings provide a useful prompt to pay attention to the texture of ordinary life. Are you endlessly putting off the walk that usually clears your head? Do you spend your evenings scrolling because it is easy, even though meeting a friend would leave you more content? Small adjustments may be possible without transforming your entire schedule. The most sensible conclusion is neither to worship a formula nor ignore the evidence. It is to experiment thoughtfully, recognise your constraints and make deliberate space for the activities that give your days meaning.

Sources: PNAS Nexus. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The study shows that meeting friends causes a better day. T F NG
2. According to the study, a seven-hour working day is more likely to go with a worse day than a five-hour one. T F NG
3. The Guardian writers reported feeling happier after following their routines. T F NG
4. The writer advises readers to ignore the evidence from the study. T F NG
5. The findings on socialising and on work each describe a point beyond which the pattern changes. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

constraints **contentious** **hamper** **indiscriminately** **miraculous** **optimise** **restorative** **undermine**

1. A single careless remark can _____ years of careful diplomacy.
2. Engineers continue to _____ the wing design to cut fuel use.
3. Tight budgets and short deadlines are the main _____ on the project.
4. Chemicals were sprayed _____ across the valley, harming useful insects and pests alike.
5. Sleep has a _____ effect: the body repairs itself while we rest.
6. Nobody expects a _____ cure for the common cold to appear overnight.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Critics questioned the _____ of data collected from self-reported diaries. (RELY)
2. Her sudden _____ from public life surprised her colleagues. (WITHDRAW)
3. His _____ attitude to leisure meant that even holidays were planned by the minute. (OBSESS)
4. The researchers were careful not to overstate the _____ of their findings. (SIGNIFY)
5. The survey sample was criticised for being _____ of the wider population. (REPRESENT)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. These are formal linkers. Albeit and notwithstanding sit in the middle of a clause, hence and lest have strict patterns, and conversely turns an idea round.

albeit	conversely	hence	lest	notwithstanding	thereby	whereby

1. The sample was large, _____ drawn from one country only.
2. _____ the doubts about the data, the headline figure was widely quoted.
3. Extroverts often recharge in company; _____ , introverts may need solitude to recover.
4. Sleep and exercise were not measured; _____ the study cannot say which matters more.
5. She muted her notifications _____ the evening be spoiled by work emails.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would a fixed recipe for a good day work for you?
2. Which part of a good day would you protect when life got busy?
3. Can trying too hard to have a good day spoil it?

9 Role-play: planning a free Saturday

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the sociable friend

You both have a free Saturday. You want to spend the whole day together with a big group of friends. Suggest a plan and explain why it would be a good day.

Student B · the quiet friend

You've had a very busy week and you need some time alone. Say what you'd like to do instead and try to agree on a plan that suits you both.

Useful phrases

I was thinking we could meet everyone for lunch.
That's a nice idea, but I'm really tired this week.
How about a short walk, just the two of us?
I'd rather spend the afternoon on my own.
We could do both if we keep it short.
Let's meet in the middle.

Afterwards, tell the class: what plan did you agree on, and who gave up more?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 C · 3 A · 4 B · 5 F · 6 D · 7 H · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 undermine · 2 optimise · 3 constraints · 4 indiscriminately · 5 restorative · 6 miraculous

6 Word forms

1 reliability · 2 withdrawal · 3 obsessive · 4 significance · 5 unrepresentative

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 Notwithstanding · 3 conversely · 4 hence · 5 lest

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