NEWS LESSON

The Science of a Good Day, and Its Limits



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	**investigate**	☐	A	on purpose, after thinking about it
2	**signals**	☐	B	taking no active part, only watching or receiving
3	**emerged**	☐	C	truly and honestly
4	**passive**	☐	D	study something carefully to find out the facts
5	**deliberately**	☐	E	signs that show something is true or is happening
6	**genuinely**	☐	F	split into parts and share out
7	**reminder**	☐	G	something that makes you remember or think about something
8	**divide**	☐	H	came out or became clear

3 Read

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

Socialising helped, although the benefit levelled off after about two hours. The study shows links rather than causes, and life rarely fits a plan.

1 Imagine waking up with a blank diary and being told to design the happiest possible day. Would you spend the morning exercising, meet friends for lunch or stay at home with a book? Most of us have strong opinions about what makes us feel good, but scientists wanted to investigate whether there were patterns across thousands of people's everyday experiences. Their 2026 research suggested that good days are not completely mysterious, although happiness is far too complicated to be reduced to a simple schedule.

2 The researchers analysed information from the American Time Use Survey, using responses from 2013 and 2021. More than 15,000 participants reported how they had spent a day and whether they considered it better than usual. The team used computer models to examine over one hundred activities, including working, socialising and leisure. Their aim was not to discover a magic routine, but to work out which patterns were linked to people reporting a particularly good day.

3 Socialising emerged as one of the strongest signals. Spending time with other people was associated with a greater chance of having a better day, although the benefit appeared to level off after roughly two hours. Work was more complicated: up to six hours was not clearly linked to a poorer day, but spending longer at work was associated with a noticeable decline. The researchers also examined exercise and other activities, building up a picture of how people divide their waking hours.

4 After the findings were published, the Guardian asked three writers to try arranging their days around the suggested patterns. The experiment produced an important reminder: even a reasonable timetable can be difficult to follow when life gets in the way. Jobs, children, appointments and tiredness do not simply disappear because somebody has created a plan. And a person who enjoys a long, quiet afternoon alone may not want to fill it with social activities.

5 The biggest limitation is that the research shows relationships rather than causes. People may go out more when they already feel cheerful, rather than becoming cheerful because they went out. Someone who can stop working after six hours may also have more money, flexibility or support than someone working a long shift. We cannot assume that changing one activity will automatically improve the rest of a person's day.

6 Even so, the findings are a useful invitation to rethink our routines. Instead of treating free time as whatever is left over, we might deliberately make room to catch up with friends, enjoy a hobby or go for a walk. We can also notice when passive entertainment leaves us feeling flat rather than rested. Perhaps the secret is not copying somebody else's ideal day, but recognising what genuinely helps us feel connected, active and satisfied with our own.

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 researchers hoped to find a magic routine that would work for everyone. T F NG
2. The benefit of socialising kept growing the longer people spent with others. T F NG
3. All three Guardian writers felt happier after following the suggested patterns. T F NG
4. Working up to six hours was not clearly linked to a poorer day. T F NG
5. The writer suggests that people who can stop work after six hours may be better off than people on a long shift. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

associated **assumption** **decline** **flexibility** **invitation** **limitation** **participants** **reasonable**

1. Heavy smoking is strongly _____ with a higher risk of illness.
2. Because of the sharp _____ in the number of young readers, the newspaper closed its print edition.
3. The main _____ of the survey is that it only asked people in one city.
4. Working from home gives many employees more _____ over when they start and finish.
5. It is _____ to expect a tired child to go to bed early.
6. Over two hundred _____ took part in the experiment.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. More than 15,000 participants _____ how they had spent a day. **(REPORT)**
2. By the time I got home, my flatmate _____ the washing-up. **(ALREADY / FINISH)**
3. After the findings _____ , the Guardian asked three writers to try them. **(PUBLISH)**
4. This path _____ by walkers since the 1800s. **(USE)**
5. If I _____ a blank diary tomorrow, I would spend it with friends. **(HAVE)**

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Check the grammar after the gap. Despite needs an -ing form or a noun, while otherwise, whereas and provided can join clauses or sentences in different ways.

consequently	despite	nevertheless	otherwise	provided	unless	whereas

1. _____ feeling tired, she went to meet her friends after work.
2. Some people recharge alone, _____ others need company to feel good.
3. You should set a regular bedtime. _____ , you will feel exhausted by Friday.
4. The office was closed for repairs. _____ , many employees worked from home all week.
5. You can follow the plan, _____ you stay flexible.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 associated · 2 decline · 3 limitation · 4 flexibility · 5 reasonable · 6 participants

6 Verb forms

1 reported · 2 had already finished · 3 were published · 4 has been used · 5 had

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 whereas · 3 Otherwise · 4 Consequently · 5 provided

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