

Train meditation and no coffee? Pro tips for a healthier morning commute

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As August arrives, the summer commute into work becomes a sweaty endeavor marked by crowded bodies, the stench of city garbage and exacerbated FOMO ("fear of missing out") from missing another perfect beach day.

But imagine a weekday morning when, instead of rushing into the office with a sweating iced coffee and pit stains to match, you were calm. Confident. Even looking forward to your workday.

Wellness experts think such a thing is possible, part of a movement that prizes self-awareness and making small, conscious steps toward a healthier, fulfilling life—like adjusting your morning commute routine.

Judy Manisco, a registered nutritionist and dietitian in Chicago, believes that slight meal adjustments could drastically improve commuters' well-being before work. "The key is to wake up early enough where you're not running around, stressed about getting to work on time, but pacing yourself and eating a healthy breakfast before work," she says.

Manisco suggests a balance of protein and carbohydrates to keep you full and energized until lunch. Her favorite breakfast? "A protein shake made from organic soy milk, raw, unsalted walnuts (they're high in nutrient-dense [omega-3 fatty acids](#)), a variety of seeds, oat bran and either a stalk of celery or a handful of spinach," Manisco says. For sweetness, she recommends adding natural cocoa or a date.

If you skip the protein shake, Manisco recommends whole-grain toast, a handful of nuts or seeds, and a cup of fruit. She warns against coffee. "Caffeine will get your heart and adrenals pumping artificially, and thus could have you feeling unnecessarily anxious or depressed," Manisco says.

Diet isn't the only trick to incorporating wellness into your morning commute. Paying attention to posture and movement can also help.

Jason Kart, a practicing physical therapist for 10 years and the owner of Core Physical Therapy in Chicago, says lower back and [neck pain](#) are the most "common ailments" among his working patients. "When you sit for a while, you turn your postural muscles off and you start using passive structures like cartilage, which breaks down easier," Kart says. "Humans are built to walk around and look for food, so when you're sitting, you're not activating those important spinal muscles, but instead causing a steady breakdown of muscle tissue."

Kart takes Metra to work each morning and notices the same behavior causing neck pain among commuters: "text neck." "Text neck" occurs when you lean your head over your phone, straining your neck muscles and thus causing joint pain. To alleviate this, Kart recommends a simple fix: "If you're standing on the 'L' or Metra, the movement of the train helps you practice stability and balance and work your postural muscles," he says.

And for car drivers who can't stand during their commute? Consider the headrest. "Bad posture is so common among drivers ... they should practice keeping their head lightly against the headrest and avoid a slouch position," he says. "This will gradually alleviate back and neck pain while driving." At work, Kart suggests periodically moving around to engage the postural muscles most commonly associated with [neck](#) and back pain.

After considering your stomach and your spine, think of your brain. One of the most popular sectors of wellness is mindfulness. Darrell Jones, general manager of Chill Chicago: Meditation and Massage and a meditation instructor, meditates on the train during his commute and recommends the practice to anyone who wants to feel "calmer and happier" entering their workspace.

Annoyed by the loud chatter or the loudspeaker on the train?

"Incorporate those sounds and how they make you feel into your meditation," Jones says. He recommends the guided meditation on apps like Calm, or finding a piece of instrumental classical, jazz, world or new age music and taking deep breaths while asking yourself questions such as: "Who do I want to be, regardless of what does or doesn't happen today? Do I want to be a jerk, or a kind soul? Do I want to embody possibility, or show up exuding impossibility?"

"An easy meditation game you can play is taking a deep breath, with your eyes closed, each time the train door opens, and exhaling when it closes," Jones says.

The most important thing, according to Jones, is cultivating a calm, positive mindset before launching into a routine. "If we can prioritize our wellness in small ways, or create a mindset of possibility before reading a horrible piece of news or a frustrating work email ... that could improve your whole day," he says.

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