

Here are 13 tricks to make every weekend

Weekends that last

A weekend can be a slippery thing if you don't keep a careful eye on it. Sure, you've got 64-odd hours separating Friday afternoon from Monday morning, but there are some weekends that – poof! – seem to vanish in a flash. It's no wonder really. When you cram in housework, errands, the needs of your family and friends and some you-time, your days off are gone before you can say "TGIF." Until the happy time when the world goes around on a four-day workweek, our Saturdays and Sundays are at risk of feeling way too short. What you need to do is get a nice firm grip on the hours you have and grow them. Try adding a few of these weekend-stretching tricks to your routine and not only will you feel more rested and relaxed on Monday morning, your two-day break will feel bigger – and brighter – than ever before. ▷

Entertain the easy way by inviting friends for brunch.



Besides, if you or your guests have young kids, everyone feels fresh and more energized earlier in the day. Keep the affair low-key by opting for a make-it-this-morning menu. Because the preparation, tidy-up and visit are all wrapped up by mid-afternoon, you have the rest of the day for other things. Like resting.

The trick Plan for next week

How you pull it off Schedule some time on a weeknight for everyone in your household to sit down and put forward their goals and responsibilities for the week. "Having a longer weekend can be a result of having a well-planned week," says life coach Lisa Martin of North Vancouver. When family members declare what they want to accomplish over the week, tasks get spread out instead of being dumped into the two non-work days. Meetings should be weekly since priorities are always changing. "Communication is key," says Martin. "This is about identifying what's a priority to you." Not only will weekdays feel more organized, weekends will feel luxuriously long and satisfying.

The trick Mix work and play

How you pull it off You know you need to hit the hardware store and computer depot this weekend. Why not choose to visit merchants located close to a park, art gallery or street festival? After you tick the chore off your must-do list, there's a bit of fun waiting for you around the corner. If you've got kids in tow, this makes the dull stuff easier to bear and gives them something to look forward to. It helps you, too: slipping in fun requires you to slow down your pace and ups the odds you'll feel more relaxed.

The trick Make a date out of drudgery

How you pull it off Shannon Brunton Stephens of Ottawa and her husband, Mark, have made Friday night their date night. Instead of candlelit dinners, however, she hits the laundromat and he picks up groceries. They then hook up for a walk with the dog. "It's a nice night for us," the 29-year-old newlywed says. They like getting the chores done and love reconnecting after a long workweek. "Then we know we have the weekend for ourselves," she says. >

make it simpler

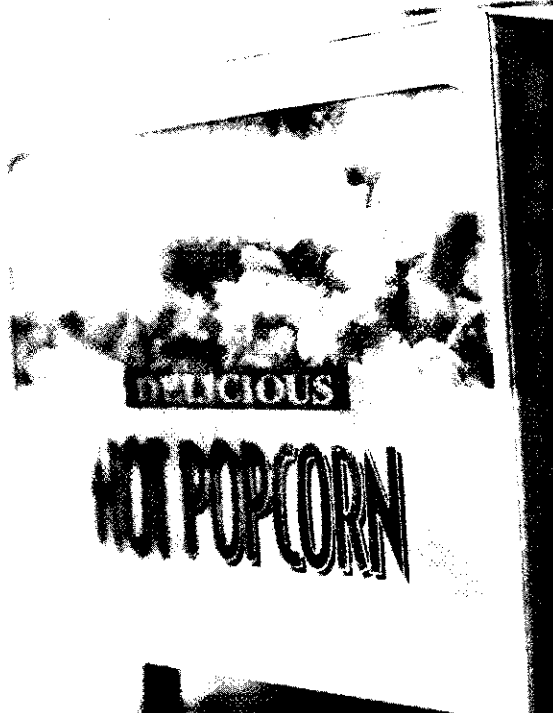
The trick Declare Thursday cleaning night

How you pull it off Instead of sprinkling the vacuuming, dusting and tub-scrubbing throughout every weeknight or clustering it all into the weekend, set aside Thursday night. It's the rip-the-Band-Aid-off-fast method: instead of prolonging the pain, do it quickly and decisively. And when everyone in the household picks a corner and gets busy — they need to book it into their schedules, too — the work will be done in no time. Not only will no precious weekend hours get lost on chores, but you've reclaimed Friday night as a great time to entertain in your spotless home.

The trick Host brunch instead of dinner

How you pull it off Create a new tradition by inviting family and friends to your house for a cheery mid-morning meal instead of losing your entire day to dinner-party preparations.

Keep Monday worries at bay with a Sunday night movie.



make it longer

The trick Start with a sweat

How you pull it off Set your alarm to a reasonable time – later than your weekday rise-and-shine hour – then get up and move. Jump on your bike, slide a yoga tape into the VCR or meet a running group like Christine Abela, 28, of Ottawa does on Sundays. Some mornings she finds it hard to drag herself to the 8:30 a.m. run, but afterwards her energy level and sense of accomplishment are huge. “And I still have the whole day ahead of me,” she says. Starting the day early and with a whole load of energy pumps you up for the rest of the day.

The trick Celebrate a work-free Sunday night

How you pull it off Without realizing it, many of us shorten our weekend by sacrificing Sunday night. How? We start worrying about Monday. Keep anxiety at bay by making sure laundry is done earlier in the weekend or at

the end of the prior week. Then you'll know you have something to wear. And instead of allowing Monday thoughts to creep into your weekend via lunch-packing, decide that Mondays are the day to buy a favourite soup or sandwich at the cafeteria. Also, plan something special to distract you on Sunday night: a family movie night, for example, or a casual barbecue with the neighbours. By keeping your brain firmly focused on the here-and-now, you skip wasting precious weekend hours. You don't want the workweek to arrive faster than it already does, so forbid yourself from thinking about it.

The trick Make a date for Monday morning

How you pull it off Before rushing off into your weekday routine, meet a friend at a coffee shop, diner or park for a morning visit. You can gab about the weekend, read the newspaper together or simply savour each other's company. Or head out by yourself and vanish into a book, recap your weekend in your journal or simply daydream out the window. You may have to get up a little earlier, but it means you'll step into your day having had some energizing fun. Plus, extending the weekend into Monday gives you something to look forward to on Sunday night.

The trick Take Monday off

How you pull it off Many of us have the option of occasionally taking a day off to create a long weekend. Pass on taking Friday off and shift it to the top of the week. Why? You've had Saturday and Sunday to shake off the previous week's tension and you'll be in a better headspace to enjoy your free day.

Also, if you want to head out of town for the weekend, returning home on Monday means highways, ferries and trains will be a lot less crowded. Not to mention the lucky-me feeling you'll get shopping in nearly empty stores. ▷

Put rewards – like reading – first and chores second.



make it better

The trick Start Saturday morning off slowly

How you pull it off Instead of charging into the day's to-do list, slow down and coast in like Winnipeg's Jo Lynn Sheane does. Although her weekends are dedicated to renovating the old home she shares with her husband, she won't pick up a paintbrush until she spends a couple of hours relaxing with breakfast and home improvement TV shows. "I call them adult Saturday morning cartoons," she says. "This is me-time, plus it has the added bonus of cheerleading me into my weekend chores." Sure, it will take longer for her projects to be completed, but since she's worked rest into her weekend, her batteries never run down.

The trick Make plans not to sleep late

How you pull it off If you've had a rough week and need to catch up on your zzzs, bypass

this step. However, if you're well-rested, do as 27-year-old Claire Kennedy of Toronto does: plan ahead and set your alarm. She arranges brunch or coffee dates with friends she doesn't get to see during her busy workweek at a commercial property management company. "You have to have something to get up for," she says. "This way, you get to pack a lot in to your day." So, instead of rolling out of bed late and kicking herself for the lost hours, she avoids that overtired feeling and squeezes more enjoyment into her weekend.

The trick Make fun a priority

How you pull it off When you put the pleasure items at the end of your to-do list as a reward – sitting down with a favourite book, for example, or calling an out-of-town friend – they often get neglected because you've run out of time. Or, when you do get to them – Sunday at 7:30 p.m. – you're too exhausted to really enjoy them. Martin suggests you do exactly the opposite: "Have fun first and then do the errands." Don't worry that the work won't get done because you'll get swept up in the feel-good activity – Martin says this just won't happen. "Instead of feeling frazzled, you feel refreshed," she says. "You go toward those tasks energized and not feeling resentful." A regret-free weekend feels a lot longer than one with a bunch of should-haves and wish-I-could-haves.

The trick Transform your weekend into a mini-holiday

How you pull it off You don't need to wait for those two weeks a year you spend at the beach to give yourself a nice relaxing case of vacation-brain. Instead, you can feel as if you've escaped to a tropical island – or an ancient city – every week. It's easy: pick up your local newspaper or log on to a local tourism site to find out what special events are planned for the coming weekend. Then choose a music festival, art fair or out-of-town museum that appeals to you and make a plan to go. Not only do you get to spend the week looking forward to it, but an otherwise ordinary weekend will be turned into something special. You step away into a completely different world or experience – even if it's just for an afternoon. **C**