

FIND MORE HOURS IN YOUR DAY

They're in there, they really are. But to figure out which time-saving techniques will truly net you some free minutes, Leslie Goldman, busy mom of two, road-tested six popular ones. According to her, you're about to get a little more space to breathe (or just sleep!).

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREA DE SANTIS



GROWING UP, I OFTEN OVERHEARD MY MOTHER'S FAVORITE soap opera proclaim, "Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives." To my 10-year-old ears, it sounded so very glamorous. Now that I'm a mom, the days of my life? They're not exactly filled with thrilling cliff-hangers (that's me in the jelly-crust-ed T-shirt buying detergent with two little girls hanging on my neck), and they feel like they're gushing through a sieve. I don't know any woman, mom or not, who doesn't feel strapped. The world is practically overflowing with "useful" strategies to help you claw back your time, but implementing them can feel like an enormous, not-worth-it project. Recently, though, after my *third* grocery trip of the week, I decided to give myself an intervention. So I tested out some shortcuts to see which would save me minutes—without costing me my sanity.

[THE ADVICE]

Only read email three times per day

Checking my phone has become a tic: I do it while standing in line, on the elliptical, and even while peeing (bet you won't be asking to borrow my phone!). People check email 15 times a day on average, a recent study found.

But the act of ping-ponging back and forth between spreadsheets and email, social media and the dinner table, is mentally exhausting, researchers say, requiring the mind to constantly refocus. Luckily, the study found a better way: When subjects checked email just three to five times a day, they experienced a drop in stress similar to what you can get from proven relaxation techniques like yoga.

THE TEST I kept track of my inbox views one morning, and it quickly became clear that I've gone off the rails. I logged six clicks by 9:41 a.m., 20 by noon. And each time, I spent at least five minutes replying to just a few messages. Ridiculous.

The next day, I sat down at my computer, determined to keep my inbox out of sight. And by 11:30 a.m.... I'd checked



my two copilots; I received a request for Cheddar Bunnies in return. Semi-astonishingly, we pulled in 21 minutes later (Waze did adjust its calculations during transit), a bit faster than usual.

● TIME SAVED: About 30 minutes my first week. And this was, hands down, the easiest trick I tried.

▶ **[THE ADVICE]**

Outsource shopping and prep meals on Sunday

I'm not alone in an out-of-hand number of trips to the grocery store: According to trend research company Mintel, 55 percent

of women hit food stores 10 or more times in a given week. Even so, when I heard that I could pay someone to shop for me, it seemed too Kardashian-esque.

it five times. Better, sure, but clinically speaking, still enough to derail my attention span. Since sheer willpower failed me, I installed RescueTime, which lets you block access to your personal worst time-squanderers, like email, gossip sites, or the productivity vortex that is Pinterest. When I tried clicking on a banned site (I forgot, okay?), I got hit with a "This site is blocked" pop-up. Tail tucked, I went back to work.

A day later, I set RescueTime for multiple one-hour periods, which forced me to spend less time on Gmail and more minutes in Microsoft Word, where I belong. I only checked my email three times, but I still went to bed with all my messages answered. And in the evening, my kids didn't feel like they were competing for my attention with their sibling named iPhone 6.

● TIME SAVED: 90 minutes a day, which doesn't include the incredible feeling of liberation.

▶ **[THE ADVICE]**

Use a traffic app to find a better route

The average motorist loses 42 hours a year sitting in traffic, according to a recent report. Depending on how serious or social you are, that's a workweek or 42 pinot grigio happy hours you're missing.

Crowdsourced apps like Waze claim to be the solution. Waze fetches the fastest route by accounting for hazards and traffic jams spotted by other users.

THE TEST

My older daughter's gymnastics class is during rush hour, so I punched in the address at 5:31 p.m. and was promised a travel time of 16 minutes. The five-mile trip usually takes about 25 minutes, so I was dubious. A pleasant robotic voice took me on an unfamiliar route, zigzagging through side streets while kindly warning me of potholes. "No way will we get there in 16 minutes," I said to

But then a busy friend told me about Instacart, a service that offers grocery delivery from local stores for \$3.99 when you order \$35+ worth of stuff. It sounded incredibly appealing, if decadent. And it made me wonder, too, about that ubiquitous suggestion to carefully plan and prep all your meals for the week ahead of time, so you can breeze through busy nights. Could these ideas, in tandem, be my dinnertime holy grail?

THE TEST

I meticulously looked up recipes on the Web (just search for "make-ahead meals" and you'll be inundated like I was), organized the ingredients into a shopping list, and chose the food I wanted on Instacart's site. I picked a delivery slot from noon to 1 p.m. the following day, and at 11:16 a.m., I began receiving texts—and ultimately a phone call—from my dedicated shopper. He asked questions like: Would I be happy with marinara sauce, as the store was out of tomato basil? Sure! I felt fancy. Then, like magic, groceries arrived at noon. I paid about \$10 more than I would have on my own, considering delivery, tip—and a few upcharges. Instacart prices, I learned, can be higher than what you'd see on the shelf; it's not a service of the store, so the company can set its own prices. But, when comparing the receipt with my shopping trip from the week before, I saw that I actually saved money (and calories) by avoiding in-store impulse purchases like ice cream and cookie dough. Next, I blanketed our kitchen island with food and attempted to transform it into meals for the week. It took 90 minutes to peel and prep veggies and make meat loaf, couscous, and other dishes. The result was four dinners, a ton of snacks, and an extremely full fridge.

● TIME SAVED: Two to three hours a week of shopping, and maybe an hour in meal planning and prep. But I felt like I sacrificed too much of my weekend looking for recipes

and getting the food going. There are services that will help you with the planning part: The Six O'Clock Scramble charges \$10 per month to send you healthy recipes and a detailed shopping list for the week. My D.I.Y. meal planning method was not quite perfect for my personality—but I did find Instacart tremendously efficient.

[THE ADVICE]

Learn how to speed-read

As a working mom with young kids, my reading repertoire is limited to books with seven words on a page, or, when I'm alone, gossip rags that allow me to scan one itty-bitty story at a time. Which

means I can ID any *Real Housewife* by her cleavage, but can barely fake my way through a conversation of substance. So I perked up when I heard about Spreeder.com, a speed-reading website. Spreeder says your inner voice slows down your reading, but you can silence it and read faster by copying and pasting chunks of text into a box that spits them out one word at a time.

THE TEST

Well, I'd been hearing about this thing called the 2016 presidential election. Aside from late-night talk-show chatter, I was a little fuzzy on the policies of the candidates, because I never had time to sit down and educate myself. I found a promising, 1,034-word Slate story and timed myself reading it leisurely: 3 minutes and 5 seconds, placing my natural reading rate at 335 words per minute. Then I found another article of similar length and pasted it into Spreeder, setting my rate at 400 WPM. I sailed through, retaining most of it—and discovered it took me just about 3 minutes (yes, barely an improvement). But, confident that I was no longer a social moron, I attempted to Spreed a 1,367-word article on Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg at a brisk 425 WPM, but only eyeball whiplash and total incomprehension ensued.

Indeed, reading at a too-fast rate can tax the eyes and confuse the brain, says Elizabeth Schotter, Ph.D., manager of University of California, San Diego's Rayner Eyetracking Lab. "With speed-reading apps, you're staring in one place, trying not to blink, with words being machine-gun shot at you. It's like putting someone on a treadmill and hitting 10." Try strategic skimming instead: Focus on the first and last sentence of paragraphs and selectively read intriguing-looking portions.

TIME SAVED: 1 minute a day. I wanted this to work, but even a bump to 400 WPM saved me only seconds per article. (Factor in the time it takes to cut and paste and it's a wash.) The site encourages users to slowly ramp up speed over many sessions, so it could potentially save a persistent Spreeder more.

[THE ADVICE]

Set a stopwatch for a time-sucking task

For years, a tray has lived on our kitchen island. You know the tray: the tray of stuff. Crumpled receipts, half-empty bottles of sunblock, mystery keys. The detritus stresses me out every time I pass it, yet I never get my act together to cull through it. The tip: Set a timer for 15 minutes, then see how much flotsam you can jettison. "Time-chunking" works for two reasons, says Laura Vanderkam, a time-management expert and author of *I Know How She Does It*: "One is that many tasks seem incredibly daunting, so we decide it's easier not to start. But working on something for 15 minutes doesn't seem so bad." The other: Giving yourself a tight time frame fights perfectionism. "You know you won't do an awesome job, but you'll make progress on the most important things. And often, that's good enough," she says.

THE TEST

I set the microwave timer for 15 minutes and tore through the tray. I found a coupon for a free burrito, a four-year-old ultrasound photo, and—oh, look! Our tax return! I made it through 80 percent before the timer dinged, at which point I recycled or filed the papers, took assorted hair products upstairs, and stashed a hard-earned \$0.28 in my wallet. It worked just as well the next day, when I whirlwind-cleaned my pantry.

TIME SAVED: Technically, none, since I never would have tackled these projects without a stopwatch goading me. But I feel so calm when I walk by The Tray—and when I can find the tomato paste where I think it should be—that I'd say it spared me at least a half hour of stress per week. And that's sort of the point of all of this, to stop feeling like a hamster with an iPhone. So count this one a winner, and watch out, toy bin: I'm coming for you next. **R**

