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CONTENTS

MULTITASKING
62 new uses • 2
Learn how everyday items can do surprising new tricks.

LIFE
money made easy • 7
Nine common (but vexing) money dilemmas solved.

FOOD
one-pot wonders • 10
These delicious dishes require just a single skillet or stockpot.

HOME

clean by the clock • 15
Quick solutions for every room in your house.

BEAUTY

make up time • 20
Simplify your beauty routine with easy shortcuts.
62 extraordinary uses for ordinary things

On any given day, you may be juggling upwards of half-a-dozen roles: short-order cook, chauffeur, sleepover chaperone, and, oh yeah, wife, friend, and full-fledged member of the workforce. Sometimes it seems as if Multitasking is your middle name. Well, guess what: You’re not alone. In every room of your house, from the bedroom to the laundry room, not-so-ordinary household items are going above and beyond the call of duty to make the things you do every day just a little bit easier. Now, that’s good company.
kitchen In less than a minute, common kitchen items can step up to the plate in plenty of unexpected ways.

wine bottle or cork
- Use as bookends. A pair of bottles, with or without the contents, can hold a small library together.
- Organize jewelry. Poke stud earrings into a cork and toss it in your travel bag.
- Replace a rolling pin. Roll piecrust or pizza dough flat with a wine bottle.
- Keep your boots up. Slide bottles into boots when storing them so they keep their shape and stand up straight.
- Pack party favors. Send dinner guests home with some of your special sauce or cocktail mix in rinsed-out bottles.
- Cap an X-Acto knife with a wine cork.

ice-cube tray
- Cut cookie dough. Roll the dough flat, then press an upside-down ice-cube tray into it for a dozen or more identical treats. Use trays with different shapes (stars, hearts) for miniature holiday cookies. Tip: This works best with trays with outer rims that don’t extend higher than the inner dividers.
- Organize desk supplies, like thumbtacks and paper clips, or sewing notions, like buttons, beads, hooks, and eyes.
- Freeze extra pesto, leftover cooking wine, broth, and sauces for cooking. Then store the cubes in freezer bags until you’re ready to use them.

uncooked spaghetti
- Keep cakes intact. Push a piece of spaghetti into the top of a cake to keep plastic wrap or a soft box lid from smudging the frosting.
- Mark your page in a cookbook with a single slender stick.
- Spear hors d’oeuvres on party platters. This works best for cold fare, like cherry tomatoes and chunks of mozzarella and basil.
- Light candles. When you don’t have long matches but you do have plenty of candles, use a piece of spaghetti to fire them all up in one go. Also handy for lighting a candle in a deep holder.

colander
- Shoo flies. Invert the colander and use it as a bug tent over burgers and buns during a cookout.
- Create a casual luminaria. Place tealights or votives inside a metal version.
- Wash your delicates. Don’t throw lingerie into the sink for hand washing. Peroxide from some toothpastes and caustic agents from other cleansers can bleach, stain, degrade, and even disintegrate delicate fabrics. Instead, put the colander in the sink and wash the garments inside it.
- Make a Halloween costume. A stainless-steel colander is a perfect Martian helmet.
bathroom A soak in the tub can wash away your cares. But there’s more magic to be found in the medicine cabinet. Behold the transformative powers of dental floss!

baby oil
- Remove latex paint from skin. Pour a generous amount of baby oil on a cotton ball and scrub.
- Untangle a necklace chain. Massage a dab of oil onto the tangled area, then use a straight pin to carefully pull apart the knot.
- Peel off bandages. Avoid involuntary hair removal—and extra agony—by rubbing baby oil over and around the sticky parts of an adhesive bandage before pulling it off.
- Slip off a stuck ring. Massage oil onto your finger and rotate the ring until you can slide it off. (This trick works to get body parts out of a number of sticky situations.)

dental floss
- Unstick a photograph. Slide a length of dental floss under the corner of a photo that’s stuck to an album page or another snapshot. Work the floss between the two surfaces to separate them without damaging the picture.
- Save a necklace. Rescue a busted strand by threading the beads onto dental floss for a quick, sturdy fix.
- Hang a painting. To hang lightweight artwork that’s not in a heavy frame, use dental floss in place of picture wire.
- Cut a cheesecake. Use unwaxed, unflavored floss to slice any soft cheeses, layer cakes, or homemade cinnamon buns from a roll.

antacid tablets
- Clean a toilet. Toss in two dissolving antacid tablets, such as Alka-Seltzer, wait 20 minutes, then brush.
- Remove a stain from a vase’s bottom. Drop a tablet in a little water and let it sit for several minutes. Wipe and rinse.
- Soothe a sting. Dissolve two tablets in a glass of water, then dab on bug bites.
- Impress a kid. Pour water into a plastic 35-millimeter–film canister until it is one-third full, drop in a tablet, replace the lid, and place the canister upside down on the ground. In 5 to 10 seconds, the gas pressure will make the canister pop its lid and shoot several feet into the air.

cotton swabs
- Touch up paint on cabinets or walls, or use a swab to apply wood stain to elaborate carvings on furniture or scratches on furniture and floors.
- Keep your phone charged. Use a swab dipped in alcohol to clean the battery contacts of a cordless phone, a cell phone, or a laptop. This will help maintain good battery connections and sustain the charge for a longer time.
- Tote touch-up makeup in a tiny evening bag by rubbing cotton swabs in concealer and eye shadow and sealing them in a plastic bag.
- Take a shine to your silver. Use a swab to apply polish to the crevices.
MULTITASKING

**bedroom** The same items that keep your bed comfortable and wardrobe neat can also preserve produce or hold CDs. It’s the stuff that dreams are made of.

**tie rack**
- Avoid necklace-untangling nightmares. Sort, organize, and display beads and chains on the pegs of a horizontally mounted tie rack. Many wooden versions have hooks about an inch apart and can separate dozens of necklaces with no overlap.
- Keep dish towels and pot holders within arm’s reach. Install the rack horizontally on a kitchen wall and hang everything right where you need it.
- Organize a desktop. Place a wooden rack flat on a table and use the spaces between the pegs to sort CDs or mail.

**pillowcase**
- Keep your underwear under wraps. When traveling, pack intimates in a pillowcase within your suitcase so they don’t get lost in a pant leg or emerge at an airport security checkpoint.
- Fend off dust. Use a pillowcase to cover a sewing machine or any other small appliance that collects dirt in its crevices.
- Make lettuce last longer. After shaking off excess water from just-washed greens, place them in a clean cotton pillowcase. Pat dry and put the whole thing in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. The moist cotton will keep the lettuce fresh longer than a plastic bag alone.

**shoe organizer**
- Raise the bar. Use a sturdy organizer to store wine and liquor bottles, a cocktail shaker, bar tools, and towels.
- Store art supplies. A plastic version is perfect for holding paints, pens, brushes, and more.
- Declutter the bathroom. Keep soaps, razors, tonics, and sprays from crowding countertops and the medicine cabinet.
- Separate socks. Keep all your panty hose, tights, and socks untangled and in full view in a clear plastic version.
- Arrange gift-wrapping supplies. Wrapping presents goes faster when you can find the bows, ribbons, tape, scissors, and cards without digging around in a box or a drawer.

**bedsheet**
- Dress up a bathroom. To replace a plain vinyl shower curtain, attach 16 clip-on drapery rings to one edge of a sheet, then slide it onto a shower-curtain rod. Back it with a waterproof plastic liner.
- Beat the heat. Tie the corners of a large sheet to close-set trees in your backyard for instant summer shade.
- Make a headboard. Wrap a sheet over a piece of plywood, staple in back, and prop up as a headboard for a quick update.
- Move furniture. Place a sheet underneath heavy furniture to protect floors and make repositioning easier.
MULTITASKING

**laundry room** A few surprising spins on utility-room essentials can give you a whole new appreciation for laundry day—and great biceps, too.

**bleach bottle**
- Pick up a scoop. Cut diagonally across the middle of an empty, clean bottle and use the half with the handle to scoop up fertilizer, rock salt, or pet waste.
- See your garden grow. Slice the bottom off an empty, clean jug to make a miniature greenhouse for seedlings. (Place the bottle open-side down over the plants.)
- Start a home gym. Fill two empty bottles with sand and use as dumbbells.
- Keep them afloat. Tie empty bottles together to use as buoys or to mark the deep part of a swimming area.

**wire hanger**
- Reach new heights. Untwist a hanger and use it to adjust out-of-reach air-conditioner vents. Also good for retrieving objects that have slipped between the stove or the refrigerator and the cabinets.
- Bend one into a giant bubble wand for kids (of all ages). (Use one part dish detergent and one part water to make your own bubble solution.)
- Remove static cling. To prevent sticky situations, run the long side of a wire hanger over a skirt, or between your skirt and panty hose or slip.

**laundry basket**
- Have a beach picnic. Tote items to the shore in the basket, then flip it over and use it as a table. Hose the basket off when you get home and it’s ready to go back to wash-day duty.
- Serve drinks al fresco. Line the basket with a trash bag and fill with ice to make a cooler for impromptu parties.
- Tame the sprinkler. Store a coiled garden hose in a basket; stash sprinklers, nozzles, and other attachments in the middle of the coil.
- Protect plants. Place a laundry basket upside down over delicate plants during a rain- or hailstorm.

**clothespins**
- Hold that thought. Use a couple of pins to keep cookbooks open while you follow recipes.
- Track your towels. If you have houseguests, write their names (and yours) on separate clothespins, then attach each clothespin to the appropriate towel to avoid mix-ups when all the towels are hanging in one bathroom.
- Support your stems. Clothespins can support vines and climbing plants in the garden. Just make sure the stems pass through the holes in the pins.
- Don’t lose your shirt. Clip camisole straps to a hanger to keep them from sliding off.
money made easier

Spend? Save? Invest? At last, some straight answers to your financial dilemmas.

Wouldn’t it be nice if your elementary-school curriculum consisted of reading, writing, ‘rithmetic, and rookie financial planning? But money—that devilish little angel of our lives—and how to deal with it are basically ignored in formal education. So we depend on our families and friends and sometimes the fates (a $5 scratch-ticket win must mean something, right?) to help direct our financial future. But relying on the people who doled out your weekly allowance even when you didn’t do your chores, or those who borrowed beer money from you back in college, may not be much help if the nation’s mounting household-debt figures are any indicator. Here, financial advisers weigh in on nine everyday decisions about money—from whether to hire an accountant to do your taxes to how to manage your bills—so you can one day count on that other big R: a comfortable, well-funded retirement.

WRITTEN BY ERIC MESSINGER ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY MAYA KUKES ILLUSTRATIONS BY GREG CLARKE
Either have your savings automatically transferred weekly to another account or save bits and pieces as you can.

Automatic saving is a wonderful thing, so do it. “Most people tend to pay themselves last in the form of savings. They see what’s left,” says Kathy Longo, a principal financial adviser with Accredited Investors, in Edina, Minnesota. “This is a great way of paying yourself first.” Have your company divide your paycheck, depositing portions electronically into two accounts, or set up a regular automatic transfer through your bank.

Either keep non-emergency funds in a savings account or put the extra savings in a CD (certificate of deposit).

The most profitable approach is to put the majority of extra savings that won’t be needed for emergencies in stocks or a stock fund. But the investment should fit the goal. If you foresee using this money soon, then combine money-market and savings accounts, treasury bills, and CDs to diversify, says Ann Diamond, a financial consultant in New York City. For long-term goals, include stocks to improve your return and protect yourself against inflation.

Either use a credit card or use a debit card.

Use a credit card and gain its rewards as long as you pay it off every month. If you have trouble sticking to your budget or controlling your purchases, use a debit card. The money will come directly out of your checking account, and you won’t be inflating your credit-card balance.

Either get a credit card with a high interest rate but a lot of perks or one with a low rate and no perks.

Most people are better off with a low rate. The perks, as appealing as they may be, don’t justify the risk of incurring debts at the higher interest rate. If you rarely miss a payment and don’t incur interest charges, then by all means enjoy the free trips and the luggage to go with them. Otherwise, says Longo, “go with the low-rate card and buy your own plane ticket.”

Either use spare cash to pay off credit cards or invest some extra money in your 401(k).

Put as much money into your 401(k) as the company will match, and only then focus on credit-card debt. To do otherwise “would be like leaving cash on the table,” says Zohlen. “A match is free money.” Again, try to renegotiate your credit card’s rate, or transfer the debt to a new card with little or no interest. If your company doesn’t have a 401(k) matching program, pay off your credit cards before investing in any retirement savings plan.

Either have your payments automatically withdrawn from your checking account or write checks for bills yourself.

Using automatic bill pay from your checking account is a great idea, especially if you have a chronic problem paying bills on time. “Given all the penalty fees you incur each time you pay late, the automatic-withdrawal option may save you hundreds of dollars a year,” says Evelyn Zohlen, president of Inspired Financial, in Garden Grove, California. Other pros: no trips to the post office for stamps and no wrist cramps from all that check writing.
one-pot wonders

Toss all your ingredients into a single skillet or stockpot, let them mingle, and create a meal as deliciously complex as one you’d get if you messed up the kitchen with wall-to-wall cookware. The easy cleanup will bring you nothing but satisfaction—as will the leftovers.
Heat oven to 300° F. Season the beef with the salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or ovenproof pot over medium-high heat. Add some of the beef to the pot and brown on all sides. Transfer to a plate. Repeat with the remaining beef. Spoon off and discard all but 1 tablespoon of the drippings. Add the wine and cook, stirring and scraping the bottom, for 3 minutes. Return the beef to the pot along with the shallots and broth. Bring to a boil. Skim any foam. Add the thyme. Cover and transfer to oven until the beef is tender, about 2 hours. Spoon into individual bowls.
Mexican chicken soup

hands-on time: 25 minutes • total time: 1 hour, 45 minutes • makes 6 to 8 servings

Recommended: 12-quart pot

2 whole chickens
(3½ pounds each)
4 carrots, halved crosswise
1 large yellow onion, halved
1 tablespoon kosher salt
1½ cups long-grain white rice
¼ teaspoon black pepper
2 avocados
½ cup fresh cilantro leaves
3 limes, halved

Rinse the chickens and pat dry with paper towels. Place the chickens, carrots, onion, and salt in a 12-quart pot. Add enough cold water (about 16 cups) to cover. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer gently, uncovered, for 1 hour. Skim off any foam that appears. Transfer the chickens to plates; let cool. Remove and discard the carrots and onion. Add the rice to the broth and simmer for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, shred the chicken meat, discarding the skin and bones. Add the meat and pepper to the broth and heat for 3 minutes. Scoop the avocados into individual bowls and ladle the soup over the top. Sprinkle with the cilantro and squeeze on the limes.
baked cod and chorizo

Hands-on time: 30 minutes • Total time: 50 minutes • Makes 6 to 8 servings

Recommended: Large ovenproof skillet

Ingredients:
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 ounces chorizo or smoked sausage (such as kielbasa), thinly sliced
- 1 1/2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes (peel first, if desired), sliced 1/4 inch thick
- 3 leeks, white and light green parts only—halved lengthwise, rinsed, and thinly sliced into half-moons
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/4 teaspoon crumbled saffron threads
- 1 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 1/2 to 3 pounds cod fillets
- 1/2 cup fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves, roughly chopped

Instructions:
Heat oven to 400° F. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the sausage and brown on both sides. Add the potatoes and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Add the leeks, broth, saffron, 3/4 teaspoon of the salt, and 1/8 teaspoon of the pepper. Bring to a boil. Meanwhile, rinse the cod and pat it dry with paper towels. Season with the remaining salt and pepper. Place it on top of the potatoes and drizzle with the remaining oil. Bake until the cod is the same color throughout and flakes easily, about 20 minutes. Sprinkle with the parsley and transfer to individual plates.
vegetable soup with Parmesan toasts

Heat oven to 350° F. Rinse and drain the Swiss chard. Stack the leaves and slice them crosswise into 1-inch-wide strips. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the Swiss chard and squash and stir to coat. Add the wine, salt, and pepper and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer until the squash is tender, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, brush the baguette slices with the remaining oil. Place on foil, sprinkle with the Parmesan, and bake until golden, 15 minutes. Ladle the soup into bowls and float the toasts on top.

2 bunches green Swiss chard, stems trimmed
3 tablespoons olive oil
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 small butternut squash (2 pounds), peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
1⅓ cups dry white wine
1 teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
12 to 16 ½-inch-thick baguette slices
1 cup (4 ounces) grated Parmesan

hands-on time: 25 minutes • total time: 45 minutes • makes 6 to 8 servings

Recommended: Large saucepan
We all live in an accelerated time. It seems everything—meals, mail, music downloads, instant messages—can be accomplished in no time at all. Everything, that is, except cleaning. It seems a bit unjust that in this modern, ultra-efficient world it takes just as long for you to clean your house as it took your grandmother—or her grandmother—to clean hers. Until someone comes up with the cleaning equivalent of paying bills online (a completely dust- and grime-free house), you can at least tailor your cleaning schedule to fit, well, your schedule. Because sometimes you can do the whole spick-and-span routine and sometimes (OK, most times) you can’t, Real Simple asked a dozen housekeeping experts for tips on what to do around the house if you have 15 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour, or half a day. Now, if you could only catch up on your e-mail...

**clean by the clock**

Easy steps to tackle any room—no matter how much (or how little) time you have.

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kitchen
KP duty isn’t easy. The main culprit: grease. Before you start combatting it, move small appliances off the counters to ensure that bacteria won’t flourish underneath them.

15 minutes
Clean countertops and the sink. Spray disinfectant in the sink and let it soak. “Otherwise the product won’t have time to kill all the bacteria and viruses you’re trying to remove,” says Janice Stewart, owner of Castle Keepers, a professional cleaning service in Charleston, South Carolina. Meanwhile, spritz the counters with disinfectant. Then scrub the sink with a sponge, rinse well, and dry. Return to the counters and wipe dry with a fresh cotton or microfiber cloth.

Wipe down appliances. Avoid damage by using wipes made to clean the surfaces of the gadgets.

one hour, add the following:
Wash the cabinet fronts. Wipe from top to bottom with a soft sponge and a solution of warm water and dish soap. If the cabinets are wood, use a wood cleanser.

half a day, add the following:
Deep-clean appliances. To freshen the refrigerator’s interior, clean it with a solution of 3 tablespoons baking soda and 4 cups warm water. No self-cleaning oven? Wipe down the inside with an all-purpose cleanser. Use a plastic scraper (or an old credit card) to get bits of food off the racks and drip pan. Dust and degrease inside and out. Remove crumbs from inside cabinets with a vacuum attachment or a damp cloth.

Consider assigning a different-colored microfiber cloth to each room of the house. That way, you can avoid spreading germs from room to room.
family room
In everyone’s favorite flop spot, clutter reigns supreme. Dirt also collects quickly in this heavily trafficked zone, so floors and furniture need a bit of extra attention.

15 minutes
Clear the clutter. Tour the room with a laundry basket in tow, picking up any out-of-place items for redistribution later.
Speed-dust at eye level. Grab two electrostatic or microfiber cloths. Rotate out the grimy cloth, or opt for quick two-handed dust-busting, says Donna Smallin, author of *Cleaning Plain & Simple* (Storey Publishing, $17).
Fluff pillows and fold throws. These small adjustments result in a big visual impact.

30 minutes, add the following:
Vacuum or dry-mop the floor. This is time-consuming but important. “Dirt can cut carpet fibers and damage wood floors,” says Jeff Campbell, founder of the Clean Team, a residential cleaning service in Jackson, California. He recommends concentrating on the areas around doorways, which harbor tracked-in dirt.

one hour, add the following:
Tackle upholstery and window treatments. Use the vacuum’s brush attachment to get dust off sofas and chairs. Clean under and behind cushions, then flip them to distribute wear evenly. Close the curtains and use a vacuum attachment to clean. For blinds, wipe each slat with a damp microfiber cloth.

half a day, add the following:
Wash the windows. To minimize streaking, use a glass cleaner and a lint-free material, such as a cloth diaper or an old T-shirt. Graham and Rosemary Haley, authors of *Haley’s Cleaning Hints* (New American Library, $15), suggest cleaning with vertical strokes inside and horizontal ones outside (or vice versa) so you’ll know which side any remaining streaks are on. Spot-clean the walls. Take off dirt, stains, and scuffs with a damp eraser pad.
Combat hidden dirt and dust. Get behind, underneath, and on top of tall furniture with a long-handled duster. Roll back rugs and clean the floor below.

You need to clean (or dry-clean) decorative pillow covers only once a year. In between, spot-clean as needed and plump and flip the pillows regularly.
bathroom
Haven of mildew and mold, this is probably your least favorite room to clean. Use flushable wipes, which make sanitizing a snap.

15 minutes
Start with the sink. With flushable wipe in hand, clean the sink (the room’s focal point) and its fixtures, concentrating on the grime-friendly seams where the two meet.
Speed-sanitize. Grab another towelette to clean the edge of the bathtub, the toilet seat, and the toilet exterior. Finish up by shining the mirror with glass cleaner and a cloth.

30 minutes, add the following:
Deep-clean the toilet. Squirt bowl cleaner around the inside edge and let it sit for a few minutes. While it’s soaking, use a wipe or a fresh cloth and all-purpose cleaner to clean the seat around its base and hinges. Return to the bowl and give stubborn rings a scrubbing with a sponge or a brush.
Deep-clean the toilet, Part II. If your bowl is porcelain, try rubbing a natural pumice stone (available at most hardware stores) on lime, rust, and hard-water stains. Keep the stone very moist throughout the process and it shouldn’t scratch.

one hour, add the following:
Damp-mop the floor. Use a wet mop with a pivoting head to get into awkward corners between the sink, the toilet, and the tub.

half a day, add the following:
Scrub down the shower and the tub. Spray the shower walls and the tub with all-purpose cleaner. Scrub from the top down so the tub floor gets the full benefit of a soaking to dissolve buildup.
Remove mildew, mold, and other stubborn bits. For lime scale–laden shower doors (they look white and murky), Dellutri recommends wiping them down with lemon oil. To dislodge mildew and mold, apply hydrogen peroxide straight from the bottle (wear rubber gloves to protect your hands). Let it soak in for five minutes, then scrub with a grout brush.

To shine faucets, Laura Dellutri recommends using a few drops of mineral oil after cleaning, then buffing the fixture dry with a fresh cloth.
tie rack
- Avoid necklace-untangling nightmares. Sort, organize, and display beads and chains on the pegs of a horizontally mounted tie rack. Many wooden versions have hooks about an inch apart and can separate dozens of necklaces with no overlap.
- Keep dish towels and pot holders within arm’s reach. Install the rack horizontally on a kitchen wall and hang everything right where you need it.
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bedroom
The same items that keep your bed comfortable and wardrobe neat can also preserve produce or hold CDs. It’s the stuff that dreams are made of.
These beauty tricks, multipurpose products, and organizing ideas will help make your journey out the door faster, easier, and more relaxed—every day.

Mick Jagger sang it with conviction: “Ti-i-i-ime is on my si-ide.” But, then, all he and most other men have to do (in the morning, at least) is shower and shave (or not) before they’re ready to face the world. You? Well, once you’ve made sure everyone else in your life is scrubbed, fed, and dressed, there’s cleansing, shaving, moisturizing, plucking, makeup, and—that evil mistress of the morning—hair to contend with.

By streamlining your routine, addressing beauty basics at the right times, and strategizing for the long-term, you can restore sanity—even serenity—to your mornings. Who said you can’t always get what you want?

**make up time**

**what to do in the morning**

**body**

Take a cooler shower. Hot water leaves skin red and blotchy (especially after a trip to the gym or if you have rosacea) and sets you back extra minutes in applying makeup.

Streamline your underwater time. In the shower, wash your hair, then comb through conditioner (which saves you detangling later, after a towel-dry). Next, apply excess conditioner to your legs (it’s a great substitute for shaving cream) and shave. Then lather up in the minutes it takes your conditioner to work. Rinse and you’re done.

Use multitasking products. A body wash/shampoo lets you lather from head to toe in one step. A moisturizing body wash allows you to skip the step of applying lotion later (but if your skin is very dry, use separate products); look for a body wash with jojoba or shea butter for best results. Moisturizers with sunscreens are another great way to skip a step.

**what to do at night**

Maintain your manicure and pedicure. If you apply a topcoat every other night to polished nails, they should look good for about seven days (toenail polish can last up to three weeks), saving you patch-up time in the morning and frequent salon visits. For an ultra-low-maintenance approach, skip the polish and smooth nails to a high shine with a buffer.

Tan as you moisturize. Don’t flap like a mad bird to dry a fake tan. Use a low-dose self-tanning moisturizer before bed.

Exfoliate. Invest about 10 nighttime minutes once or twice a week for an at-home facial mask and body scrub. You’ll look fresher, moisturizers will be absorbed faster, and with your improved complexion, you might be satisfied with less makeup.

**long-term planning**

Impose a one-product policy. That is, one product per purpose, to save you (long) moments of indecision or fumbling through almost-empty bottles of conditioner looking for the perfect type. If you share a bathroom or a shower, try to apply the limit to everyone. If you can’t agree
body

long-term planning (continued)

(or just can’t let go), organize one shelf or shower caddy this way for fast access and keep all the extras in another area of the shower or stored away in a closet, then switch when you want variety. Choose clever packaging. Tubes that stand on the dispensing end and pump packs and bottles ensure quick application (and less fighting over who left the lid off again).

Banish body hair. Depending on your schedule, budget, and pain threshold, cream depilatories (which smell less noxious than they used to), waxing, laser treatments, and electrolysis can spare you from shaving for anywhere from a week to indefinitely.

hair

what to do in the morning

Don’t stress over second-day hair. No time to shampoo? If your hair is long enough, smooth it into a low ponytail. If it’s not—or if it still feels grungy—try a twist on the old-fashioned baby powder-at-the-temples tip and sprinkle a good-quality scented body powder at your hair’s roots to absorb oil, then brush. Time bonus: no need for perfume.

Leave it wet and accessorize. Wet hair can look “undone,” but add a barrette or a hair band and you have a neat, pulled-together look. For dense or curly hair, gather it loosely at the back, twist, and secure with a claw clip.

Use the right drying tools. A dryer 1,600 watts or higher gives you the fastest results. And don’t ditch the nozzle attachment: It directs and condenses airflow and cuts drying time (for curly hair, opt for a diffuser). Try a fast-drying styling product before drying.

what to do at night

Deep-condition. A couple of nights a week, apply a nourishing mask to damp hair. Blow hair with a hot hair dryer, then put on a shower cap. The heat helps the nutrients penetrate the hair. It’s worth the effort: Healthy hair has less frizz to tame and responds better to styling.

long-term planning

Script your next meeting with your hairstylist. Tell him you want a cut that suits your hair’s natural texture, alert him to any foibles (like a cowlick or an odd part), and have him suggest ways to style the cut without blow-drying. Write down your questions and make sure you cover them before moving on to celebrity gossip.

Maintain your color. When dying your hair, stay within two shades of your natural color to ward off obvious roots and lengthen the time between touch-ups.

Schedule your next appointment before you leave the salon. You don’t want to wait until you are desperate and have to take the only appointment that’s left, for an inconvenient time slot. (A good cut should last six to eight weeks. Color should last anywhere from four to eight weeks.)

makeup

what to do in the morning

Stick to the basics. Skip foundation if you have only a minute or two and instead apply a little concealer under your eyes, in shadows around your nose, and on any blemishes. Follow with a lip and cheek tint. Finish with a coat of mascara.

Brighten your eyes. Apply a beige shadow all over the lids and to the inner corners of your eyes. It instantly brightens eyes and makes you look as if you’ve had a full eight hours of sleep (instead of three).

Try products with built-in applicators. If you prefer to wear foundation, one with an attached brush will go on faster. Compact foundations are also quicker to apply and easier to blend than liquids.
makeup

what to do at night

Groom your eyebrows. Spare yourself the pain and redness on a busy morning by plucking stray hairs at night, after you wash your face. Lay out makeup the night before. You may never get around to laying out your clothes, but makeup is an easier task. Choose a few key cosmetics and keep them in one container. Before going to bed, take everything out and line it up in order of use, to avoid having to dig in the morning. (Save experimenting for occasions when you have more time.)

Perform daily maintenance. Take care of all your once-a-day tasks—such as flossing, pushing back cuticles, and other little grooming jobs—at night and leave mornings free for the essentials.

long-term planning

Weed out what doesn’t work. No matter how expensive they were, holding on to cosmetics you don’t use is a waste of space and time. Pull out your favorites and keep them in one place. Toss the rest. If you can’t bring yourself to do that, at least put them in another drawer (maybe for Halloween). Or...

Double up. Keep a duplicate set of makeup in your handbag or office drawer for those days when you have absolutely no time to apply at home. In your cleanup, you’ll probably discover extras you can use to create this set.

Have it delivered. Work out which products you replace regularly—for makeup, shower, and hair—and how often you need them. Then set up a recurring order at a website, like drugstore.com, so you don’t waste time shopping for each item as the need arises.