

Are you on AutoPilot?

BY DR. BIJANA KADAKIA, ND, SERENITY WELLNESS CLINIC

How is it nearly April already? Feels like just yesterday I was enjoying seeing everyone's holiday lights - well, it was - many lights are still twinkling in my neighborhood - for which I am grateful. I love those cheery lights on my drive home! But time does seem to be flying by and that feeling is a reminder for me to check in. I like to check in on why time is flying and the impact it's having on my goals and habits.



Time flies when you're having fun, right? Absolutely it can. Time can also fly by when life is routine. One reason time seems to speed up as we age is that we have fewer novel experiences and our brain stops attending to routine events. When we're young, so much is new and our brain lights up with each new experience. As we age and gain experience, our brain recognizes more and doesn't respond the same way. Essentially, we go on autopilot.

Our brain having an autopilot setting can have positive and negative impacts. Many people wake up and run through a full morning hygiene routine without thinking much about it. If you don't even have to think about brushing your teeth, because it's so routine, that's autopilot at it's best. That is a power I like to help my patients harness. On the other hand, if you pick up your phone to look something up and end up scrolling through social media or lost in a game and suddenly realize an hour has gone by, that's autopilot at its worst.

Part of my work with patients is to tune in to what's on autopilot. I try to help patients set healthful habits on autopilot and pull less healthful activities into awareness. The best method I know to stop autopilot on activities that I want to limit is to use a timer. Many phones have built in app-specific


timers, but you can always set a timer on your microwave, phone or even a kitchen timer. That break in attention of a timer can pull us out of autopilot, so we can choose to continue what we were doing or move on to something else.

To turn autopilot to work in our favor, two important strategies I employ are making the new habit easy and linking it to an existing habit. By easy, I mean incredibly easy, easier than you think, super low bar. Setting the bar low to start gives you a base to build on and a sense of success. Let's say you want to start flossing your teeth more regularly - keep your floss on the counter and start by flossing just your front teeth (make it easy) or just your problem areas immediately after brushing your teeth (link to existing habit) which you probably do pretty automatically already.

If you need support putting healthy habits on autopilot, I'm here to help. More information at DoctorBijana.com.



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