

Convict Chronicles: 18 Tips to Survive Prison

If I'm honest with myself, there's a strong argument to be made that prison saved my life or at the very least, likely extended it. Away from my addictions and dangerous lifestyle prison-life is almost quaint. A much needed opportunity to pause and re-evaluate my lifestyle choices.

Before prison, I was a hot mess. I was (am) an alcoholic with a bad back, adult acne, beer belly, and receding hairline that had me looking and feeling a decade older than my 30 years. In just the last year before my arrest I had put on 20 low-testosterone-stress pounds and worse: I didn't care.

Prison woke me from my downward spiral. It was here that I vowed to make some changes. I would refuse to allow myself to fall any deeper into the well. I would create new healthy habits to replace my typical unhealthy ones. I knew I could not avoid getting older, but I was determined to leave these walls looking and feeling younger than when I arrived. I dove into the research, ordering books and magazines on healthy living -- trying all the recommendations I could.

These days, 5 years later, I feel fantastic and dare I say, I look it as well. I'm living proof that small steps work towards arriving at a better destination. It's never too early -- or too late! -- to adopt new healthy habits into your life, but you do have to choose them every day. Over and over...and over, until they become automatic. It is only then that the seemingly impossible becomes a reality.

Below you will find a list of my top tips -- those that worked best for me. I whole-heartedly recommend them all, but remember it took me 5 determined years to instill them into my life. Start small, try one at a time. The secret is to simply start and then start over every day, getting a little better and easier as the years progress until one day you find yourself looking in the mirror and meeting the new, healthier, hopefully happier, you.

1. Start your day with ice cold water. Drink 1 cup to help fight overnight dehydration and jump-start your metabolism. Splash your face with some for a jolt of energy and radiant skin. Some longevity experts claim cold showers help build the immune system too.

2. Eat a protein packed breakfast. Studies show protein in the mornings help us lose weight and gives more energy through-out the day.
3. Do mini-bursts of body-weight exercises 3x/day. Push-ups, squats, power yoga, and similar body-weight moves have been associated with better overall health and longer life spans.
4. Eat the right foods: protein, veggies, fruits, grains, nuts, et cetera. Stay away from sweet or salty processed snacks.
5. Drink a cup of coffee and tea daily along with 8 glasses of water to improve overall health.
6. Read at least 30min./day. Fiction or non-fiction for fun or to learn something new -- especially beneficial before bed.
7. Do mentally challenging puzzles (sudoku, crosswords, etc.) at least 30min./day. You could also challenge yourself to learn a new language or study a new topic.
8. Connect with others at least 30min./day. Play games, walk and talk, call home -- they key is to avoid self-isolating.
9. Listen to music at least 30min./day. Listening to music while working out has been associated with increased results.
10. Be grateful. Find 5 things to be grateful for every morning and evening. Start a gratitude journal -- the positive thinking can literally re-wire our brain.
11. Limit watching T.V. to no more than 3 hours a day. If possible, try to watch educational programming: NatGeo, PBS, History, Discovery e.g..
12. Move your body. Do something physical every day -- at least 20 min./day. It doesn't matter if it's cleaning your cell or walking to chow, the point is your moving.
13. Clean and organize. There are whole books dedicated to the benefits or organizing and even just the power behind simply making your bed every morning.

14. Get back to nature. Find ways to enage with nature as much as possible (yard, watching nature shows, reading travel/nature zines). As humans we have a deep instinctual connection with nature and as such need it in our lives.

15. Sleep 7-9 hours a night. The benefits are endless and utterly important to a healthy lifestyle.

16. Care about yourself by taking care of yourself. All of you: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

17. Give yourself time. Research shows creating and sticking to new habits takes, at least, 90 days (a season) to become our new normal.

18. Start now.

By Leo Cardez (pen name)

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