



Being 'Mesponsible'

7 self-care tips (that really work) to prepare you for 2016



What does 'self-care' mean and who is it for?

Put simply, self-care is looking after yourself so that you can be in top condition – mentally, emotionally, physically and any other aspect of your wellbeing that you consider important. It's the care *you* do, for *you*, in just the same as the care you extend to others – being kind and gentle, listening, offering support and help in whatever way you can, loving, advocating for, nourishing and minding. It contributes to your self worth and, as Jim Rohn says, "your self worth will equal your net worth". It's what enables you to persist towards achieving your goals. The more you invest in caring for yourself the better you will be able to care for other and to be on top of your game.

Self-care needs are not limited to particular roles, individuals or groups; it's important for everyone, all ages and all walks of life. It's especially important for those whose role in life – personal and professional – requires them to give and to care for others. However, given that people are ultimately responsible for themselves, everyone has a responsibility to contribute to their own health and wellbeing rather than relying on others to provide all the care across all aspects of our lives.

Who's looking after YOU?

There's increasing focus on and interest in self-care in personal and professional life in recent years. Some of this is driven by the desire to reduce the cost and burden of suboptimal health on society. Lack of physical, psychological, mental and emotional wellness costs employers, industry, health services and society in general so investing in people makes sense. It makes a lot of sense then for those in positions to influence people to encourage and enable self-caring practices and habits. Nowhere is this more important than in service industries, such as health, where the bureaucracy can seemingly overlook the fundamental needs of people as secondary to budgets, deadlines and metrics. However the use of the term 'self-care' in health can often refer simply to patients ability to self-manage their physical needs such as grooming and bathing, toileting, eating and drinking, being physically active, resting and sleeping. But self-care includes everything positive you do for yourself – physical activity, mental 'self-talk' and taking time out to heal and recharge, focusing on relationships and engaging with people emotionally, spending time with friends, treating yourself in small ways, using a support person or group, fulfilling your spiritual needs and preferences, and fundamentally about loving yourself as you are! By not doing these positive things, people may resort to unhealthy practices such as alcohol, drugs, unhealthy food, too much TV and games, self-absorption etc. To achieve optimal health and self-actualisation, patient self-care needs to extent to all aspects of their lives and personhood, and self-care practices need to be incorporated into staff development and support. Importantly, people in some age and cultural groups may perceive self-care as being off-limits and therefore require permission and leadership to make it happen.

Self-care Myths

There are many myths about self-care that impede people's ability or readiness to engage in it. These myths speak for themselves so require very little explanation. However, it's important to acknowledge them so they can be recognised for what they are and help demystify the notion of self-care.

The top ten myths include that self-care is:

- **Selfish and self-indulgent:** selfishness is “the failure to balance self interests with the interests of others’ welfare or norms of social responsibility” (Ford 2001, *Selfishness in Child Development*, Cengage Learning). The World Health Organisation (1998) defines self-care as “what people do for themselves to establish and maintain health, and prevent and heal from illness”. Wikipedia defines it as “any necessary human regularity function which is under individual control, deliberate and self-initiated” (accessed 12/12/15).
- **Time consuming:** short moments of self-care, being mindful about yourself and your needs, stepping out for a short break, breathing, sharing a hug, positive self-talk, laughing and smiling, are all highly effective self-care activities. They aren't difficult, time-consuming or costly.
- **Costly and requires resources** – as above. And remember that one annual expensive holiday is not as effective as regular short (cheap or free) self-caring activities.
- **Difficult to do** – as above
- **An optional extra:** with the definitions referring to self-care as necessary to regulate human function and to establish and maintain health and heal disease, it's hardly an extra!
- **Taking away from (caring for) others** – see Carl Bryan's quote below!
- **A myth** – it doesn't work, has no real benefits: a study by 'Experience in Motion' in 2010 found that the keystone to positive healthcare experiences is staff self-care, recommending a shift in focus from 'caring for others' to 'caring for self'. <http://experienceinmotion.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Executive-Summary-5-Dimensions-of-Self-Caring.pdf>
- **About perfectionism** – self-care is equally about acknowledging, accepting and loving yourself as you are, with all your flaws and short-fallings, rather than aiming for perfectionism. Mistakes and flaws lead to growth that can actually increase your effectiveness and productivity. Self-care can increase your awareness about these and strategies to manage them.
- **All about spirituality:** self-care refers to intentional activities by oneself to care for their fundamental needs – whatever they are. For some people this includes spirituality. Your self-care strategy must not exclude practices because of what others might think or be based solely on what others do.
- **Not for me!** Really - says who? If you are not caring for all aspects of yourself you risk negatively impacting on and detracting from your ability to care for others – you could become tired, run down, complacent, even resentful without ever knowing. Read Carl Bryan's quote again.

*“Taking good care of YOU
means the people in your life
will receive the best of you,
rather than what's left of you”!*

Carl Bryan, Tennis Coach

Self-care habits and strategies

To self-care successfully you need to build activities into your routine so they become good habits. One way to do this is to have a morning and evening ritual that is designed to suit you and to fit into your lifestyle. Then stick to it everyday so that eventually you do them without having to think about them.



Morning Ritual – putting you in control of your day so you are not starting your day on someone else’s agenda! Try using PRESENT from ‘The Positive Woman’ by Gale Lindenfield (1992) – see below. If you’re short on time you can combine a few steps – do praise, exercise, reflect and schedule during a quick walk or other exercise and ‘express’ your reflections and schedule in your journal later. Reading might be limited to an inspirational quote or one page of an article or book. The important thing is that you make it a habit and do it regularly. I think of this as ‘being present’ as well as a well-earned ‘present’ to yourself.

- **Praise and peace** - start the day quietly by showing gratitude for you and all you have. This could include meditation, prayer and/or yoga
- **Read** – something inspirational and positive, that stimulates your brain and motivates you into action
- **Express** – write down your feelings about yourself, life, the day ahead, what you’ve read etc. in a journal
- **Schedule** – write a plan for your day and check in on your short and long-term plans
- **Exercise** – do something active even if only for 5 minutes
- **Nourish** – eat a healthy breakfast
- **Track** – monitor your progress throughout the day in relation to your daily plan, thoughts, actions, achievements etc.

Evening Ritual - Transitioning your brain to going to bed. Focus on REST and aim to get 7 to 8 hours of quality sleep every night.

- **Restful activities** – meditation, hot shower, bath, light candle, reading, essential oils, cuppa
- **End ruminations** over work and stress by writing down a few dot points for tomorrow’s ‘to do’ list so they are out of your head.
- **Switch off technology** – or at least silence phones, tablets etc. Don’t watch TV at bedtime (or ever - it’s junk food for the brain)
- **Talk positively** to yourself about your day, your achievements, your worth and your future

Other Good Self-Care Habits

- **Presence** – be happy now instead of ruminating over the past or worrying about the future. If you find yourself doing that just smile and think about something happy
- **Place happiness** before success, not the other way around
- **Keep a joy list** – include activities that are free as well as some that cost money – there’s a good argument that spending money on your self-care signifies that you value it (and yourself)
- **Be gentler** on yourself in every activity, thought and action. This requires you to slow down and be present
- **Focus on caring** for yourself first, then focus on others
- **During times of demand** or stress you need a larger dose of self-care!



7 Self-care Tips That Really Work

Here are my 7 tips for self-care. Try them everyday over the holidays and get yourself ready for a great year ahead; it'll be a regular habit by the time you get back to work! I call it 'Me Times'

Morning Ritual.

Develop a morning ritual that fits your routine and schedule, and stick to it. Make it a habit. Let nothing or no one interfere with you ritual even if at busy times you have to shorten it.

Evening Ritual.

Develop an evening ritual that helps you unwind and prepare for a restful nights sleep. Make it a habit.

Treats

Identify some special treat that you enjoy – some freebies and some that you are willing to pay for. Incorporate these into your life. Be mindful and deliberate about these so that you recognise and enjoy the treat. The expensive cup of coffee you have as you rush to the next meeting is not really a treat and probably a waste of money. And it could develop into one of those bad habits that are used to substitute effective self-care!

Inhale

Get into the habit of focusing on your breath, taking deep deliberate inhalations and slowing your breath – aim for 4 or 5 breaths per minute. At times of high demand and stress stop and inhale a few deep breaths. This gives you time to think and manage your reactions as well as feeding your frontal cortex with much needed oxygen, reducing your heart rate and blood pressure, & releasing dopamine.

Mindful

Be mindful about your present situation, your feelings and options. Make mindfulness a habit that you practice daily or several times a day. Do a mindful activity before you go into a stressful meeting or situation. There are plenty of short, guided mindful activities available on the Internet. Check out the CALM app that you can access anywhere anytime play.google.com.

Exhale

After a deep breath exhale completely and let go of any negative feelings and thoughts. Push the breath out, hear the sound of your breath escaping and feel your lungs empty. Allow your body to relax. Do 3 – 5 deep inhalation and exhalation cycles to reenergise your body and brain.

Smile

Make smiling a habit. When you smile the world smiles with you. Smile at yourself in the mirror, so if no one else smiles at you at least you get one from yourself. Smiling releases the happy neurotransmitters dopamine, serotonin and endorphins that cause you to relax as well as dropping your heart rate and blood pressure. psychologytoday.com

For more information and support with facilitation, whole person learning, workplace engagement strategies and mentorship contact pauline@7sensesconsulting.com.au

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0400 598 759 ● 02 6554 2281 ● pauline@7sensesconsulting.com.au ● 7sensesconsulting.com.au