

SELF-CARE TIPS

Below info with thanks from the blog of María Tomás-Keegan, a certified career & life coach
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If you are like most women, you've been raised to take care of others first. I was, too. It seems like the right thing to do. It may feel selfish to take care of you before tending to the needs of those who depend on you.

It feels like a constant battle to find time in your busy day when family, career, friends, and community are all vying for your attention.

The truth is, unless you replenish your own reserves there will be little of yourself to give.

Everyone knows this to be true. Yet finding time is hard.

When You're Tired, Good Choices Go Out the Window

As a busy woman, pulled in many directions, exhaustion—maybe even burn-out—will take over. The decisions and choices you make from this state of stress and frustration are likely to be based on expediency, rather than good sense.

Guarding against this takes effort. That may be hard for you, too. After all, you're already tired, what makes you think you can exert one more ounce of effort for you?

I can hear you: *I'm too tired to put in any more effort; I'll do me later.*

It Takes Time to Plan Self-care

Another truism. But you've already run out of time in the day and it's time for bed. You're restless and not sleeping well because of all those thoughts going through your mind about the things you didn't get done, and what's facing you tomorrow.

You're beating yourself up because you feel like you've failed someone—or, perhaps yourself.

This behavior becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Setting Yourself Up to Fail

If you don't plan for self-care, then you can't fail at self-care. But what happens when you run out of steam? Who will take care of all those people who depend on you to be there for them, to be your usual strong, resilient self?

Feeling Guilt or Shame

These emotions can be so compelling and deep-rooted that they are hard for you to overcome. You may find a moment to sit quietly with a cup of coffee and just stare out the window, and a thought pops into your head about getting something done for your child or spouse or parent. Instead of staying in that moment of relaxation, you pop up and get moving because someone else is depending on you to get that done.

There goes your peaceful moment.

How to Break the Cycle

What does it mean to give care to yourself?

Self-care: *the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness; expressing oneself is an essential form of self-care.*

There are some important words in this definition: *practice, active, protecting, well-being, happiness, expressing*. They guide you in finding ways to break the cycle.

I love what Ernest Hemingway said in [*Men Without Women*](#).

“The most painful thing is losing yourself in the process of loving someone too much and forgetting that you are special, too.”

Self-care is a Developed Skill and a Practice

Just because you haven't done self-care at all or not so well, does not mean you can never do it. It is an acquired skill and it takes practice.

To practice at something means to do it regularly. It does not mean to do it perfectly.

And self-care requires you to actively participate. Starting is the first step. What small step can you take to put your own personal care at the top of your priority list? Add just one small thing to your daily routine and do it regularly.

The scientific evidence says it takes about 21 days to turn a [new behavior into a habit](#). Three weeks. Could you practice just one change for three weeks if it would make you feel better? More in control? If it would raise your self-worth?

Protecting You

Who knows better than you what you need? Do you need to rest? A nice meal? A walk in the woods or on the beach? A massage? Peace and quiet?

No one knows exactly what you need but you. And you may even struggle to try to figure that out at times.

When you don't know what you need, the people around you will push their boundaries—assuming you've set any. It may not be intentional, but they will intrude on you and cause you to feel uncomfortable.

Protecting your well-being is essential to self-care. By setting boundaries on your time, your space, the people you surround yourself with and your energy, you can teach the people you care about how to treat you.

When you do this consistently, people will know when you're unavailable, because you're taking care of yourself. They will learn to respect this—and respect you. In fact, they may learn a new practice themselves.

Self-care is Woven into Your Happiness and Self-worth

Imagine you are a woman who takes time every morning to spend the first hour of her day in self-reflection, exercise, and reading—setting herself up for an amazing day.

How do you think she will feel as the day unfolds, even if she faces some obstacles that could derail her?

Self-assured. Self-reliant. Empowered.

When you attend to your own needs FIRST, your capacity to give is so much greater.

I use the metaphor of the beautiful, gilded teacup and saucer to explain how self-care can benefit us and everyone around us.

When you fill your cup and keep filling your cup, it will eventually overflow into the beautiful saucer. With practice to develop the skill of setting boundaries to protect you, this is possible every day. From the overflow, you give to those you support with love, kindness, and grace.

When your cup is empty, or always in need of filling, what you have to give is pieces of you. Eventually, you will feel less than a whole being, wondering how you got to this place of feeling unworthy. Not able to be at your best for the people you love, and those who depend on you.

I believe your self-worth is grounded in your practice of self-care.

Expressing What You Need

Another important piece of self-care is the way you express yourself. I believe this is both inward expression—how you talk to yourself—and outward expression—how you communicate to others what you want and need.

Finding your voice is critical to expressing what you need. Being honest with yourself about your needs is also critical. Without your authentic voice and honesty, the words you say to yourself may sabotage your efforts. *I'm a miserable failure at this. I'm no good at taking care of anyone, let alone myself.*

It starts with becoming your own best and loving friend. Be kind, gentle and forgiving. Care enough about you to take care of you and believe you are worth it.

If you're not in the habit of talking to yourself with kindness, this will take some practice, too. One small step might be to look yourself in the mirror and say, *Good morning, beautiful. I'm going to take good care of you today.* Don't laugh. If you practice this—and mean it—you will see a remarkable difference in the words your inner voice speaks to you.

Once you're feeling good about the inward expression, you may not need to worry so much about the outward expression—it may come quite naturally. But if it doesn't, practice asking others, in the same kind voice you use on yourself, to give you the time and space you need to take care of you. Explain to them that you want to be able to show up for them as the best mom, partner, daughter, boss, employee

you can be, and that requires you to take a bit of time today to replenish your reserves—to fill your beautiful teacup.

Choose Your Foundational Self-care Activities

As they say, there is no time like the present to get actively engaged in your own self-care. Everyone derives different benefits from self-care activities. What may seem like a torturous activity to you, may be exactly what your friend needs to relax. So, withhold judgment and decide what suits you best.

Remember, doing self-care does not need to take a lot of time at one time. The truth is, the cumulative effect of doing several things spread throughout your day is truly what continues to keep your cup full.

Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- It might be in the woods or on the beach or walk your dog around the neighborhood.
- Be still for a while, perhaps quietly listening to a guided meditation.
- Buy flowers. Go buy yourself some flowers, arrange them and sit with a cup of tea to enjoy their fragrance.
- Slow down. Whatever you're rushing through, consciously slow your pace, breathe deeply, become more mindful of what you're doing and enjoy the experience. Are you eating on the run? Slow down. Are you rushing to get to work? Slow down. Are you hurrying to take your relaxing bath? Slow down.
- Take a break—do something else that takes your mind off it and reduces the stress around it.
- Move your body in ways that relieve stress for you. For some, this may include running or hiking. For others, it may be yoga or Pilates. Or you may prefer stretching and strengthening at the gym.
- Be creative. Whatever that might mean for you, engage in an activity that you love doing so time seems to stand still and fly by all at the same time.

- Allow yourself the grace to take an hour, or an afternoon, and immerse yourself into something fun and mindless.
- Surround yourself with people who make you laugh every day.
- Personal care. Get a new hairstyle. Manicure. Pedicure. Massage. Facial. All-day spa-day.
- Buy tickets. Buy yourself (and your favorite companion) tickets to a concert or play that you've wanted to see.
- Who loves to play like a kid? Go play with them. It might even be a kid in your life. Put yourself in their shoes and become a kid for a while.
- Promise yourself. I will not take myself so seriously. I will try my best. I will not beat myself up for being less than perfect. I will do at least one thing every day to honor me and my self-care.
- Be grateful. Writing in a gratitude journal each day can do wonders to prepare you for an amazing day. Start with just three things a day and build from there. What are the small things, often the ones you take for granted, and the big things in your life for which you are grateful? Start your day with these. End it by reading them again and watch your sleep improve. It did for me.

Be Kind to Yourself

I've said this before. If you get nothing else, I want to be sure you get this. It's not about being perfect at this self-care stuff. It's about starting with one small thing that allows you to breathe more, relax more, feel more in control—and building from there.

I know many people say, *practice makes perfect*. In this case, I don't agree. Practice makes progress, and progress in the area of self-care is what you're going for.

The more you do it, the more you'll want of it. The more of it you get, the fuller your cup. When your cup is full, you show up happy, confident and ready to rock your world.

When you give from that place, everyone in your world will take notice. You've just become a role model for every other woman and girl in your sphere of influence. Maybe even some men will notice.

Remember: You're worth it!

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