



Don't save the best for last: the importance of self-care

All of us have priorities, and it is common that in these busy times, people put their careers and their families ahead of themselves. Reading this, you may wonder: *but what am I without my work and my family?* When people consider work-life balance they often think of work and family or relationships, but often miss a very important part of the equation: ourselves! Taking care of oneself is needed to build resilience and tend to all the other things in our lives.

What is *self-care*? Self-care is just that – intentional actions and effort to take care of our own physical, mental, and emotional health. While self-care is unique to everyone, for many it is commonly deprioritized and put on the back-burner, silently simmering unattended and forgotten. But self-care really is important, and shouldn't be relegated to the bottom of your list of things to pay attention and give time to.

Self-care means different things to different people – maybe it's enjoying a long bath, listening to your favourite podcast, meditation, travel, enjoying a meal with friends, or going for a jog. At the root, self-care can be anything that nourishes your mind, body, or spirit. The trick is to make it a priority, rather than something you do when you have the time.

To help get you thinking more about your own self-care, here are some categories self-care activities fall into:

Health

This means taking care of your physical body, and includes [eating healthily](#), exercising regularly, and getting adequate amounts of good quality sleep. Building these habits into your routine can strengthen your immune system and improve your mood.

Hobbies

Hobbies can really be anything that you enjoy for enjoyment's sake, from playing a sport, learning a language or a musical instrument, seeing the latest movies or reading books that you love. Regularly doing things just-for-fun is not frivolous, but an excellent way to take care of yourself.

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Social

Make time to see your friends. Talk about what's going on in your life, and listen to them share what they're thinking about. Being social contributes to your sense of self-worth and relieves stress.

Spiritual

This is another realm that can really take on a lot of different manifestations. For some people, religion and prayer are the way they engage with the spiritual side of themselves. For others it's yoga and meditation. Others of us do things we would never say are spiritual such as going to the spa, taking long hot baths, or going for a walk in nature. Whatever it looks like for you, these are activities that nourish our private inner selves.

Above all, remember that self-care isn't "selfish". Taking care of yourself is actually one of the most generous you can do for those around you, be they your coworkers, your family, and your friends. When you take good care of yourself, you are much more available to take care of and help others as well.

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A checklist for positive mental health

When people hear the words mental health, they often think only of mental illness or lack thereof. But positive mental health encompasses much more than that, and is actually a separate measure altogether.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as, “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Positive mental health is, therefore, a state of being in which social, emotional, and spiritual factors intersect to create the best possible level of functioning. Further, positive mental health can coexist alongside mental illness; just as optimal physical health is more than just the absence of illness, so is mental health more than the absence of mental illness.

Positive mental health checklist

Here is a checklist of factors that are found to contribute to this overall positive state of mental health. Take a look and see if you can identify their presence in your day-to-day life.

You experience pleasant emotions

It may sound obvious, but ask yourself if you are experiencing positive emotions such as delight, satisfaction, happiness, and laughter. Negative emotions are a part of everyone's life, but they should exist in balance with positive ones. What ratio of positive to negative feelings do you experience?

You find meaning in what you do

Do you find nourishment and fulfillment in your day-to-day activities? Do you find meaning in your work, your loved ones, your hobbies? Feeling like what you do with your time has worth is an important part of positive mental health.

You are able to deal with everyday challenges

A part of positive mental health is your ability to deal with life's daily challenges without becoming overwhelmed and stressed. Stress happens, but someone with positive mental health will experience it without letting it take over or become overwhelming.

You are socially connected and engaged

Positive mental health also has a social aspect - are you in touch with friends on a regular basis? Do you feel connected to a community and engaged with your peers? Do you trust others and feel trusted by those close to you?

If you didn't check all of these off, it does not mean you are not experiencing positive mental health. However, if you see room for improvement, use the checklist as a guide to help you make changes. You can also seek support from a counsellor on how to get the most out of your life and achieve positive mental health.

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