

VERY BEST SELF-CARE PRACTICES



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INTRO

Self-care is not a luxury. It's the basic maintenance we require to keep ourselves able to keep up with the demands of a complex and challenging world. Just as we need to change the oil in our cars, or take our pets to the vet, we require basic upkeep to stay balanced and healthy.

Self-care is more than getting a pedicure or a massage. It's an attitude towards one's self that is respectful and compassionate.

PREVENTING BURNOUT

Burnout is not just a buzzword; it's a real syndrome characterized by apathy, poor sleep, irritability, and the inability to feel pleasure.

Everything appears to be a chore, and you might feel like a hamster in a wheel. Burnout is responsible for documented emotional and physical problems in medical professionals, as well as teachers, for example. Without a self-care plan to prevent burnout, it can sneak up on us.

Never before have woman had so many choices. Unfortunately, our society hasn't figured out how both parents can have a career and run a household without feeling constantly behind the eight ball.

Below are the practices that I have gathered over my 25 years of clinical work as a therapist. They are highly effective and simple, but do require some practice. I once heard a funny response to the complaint, "But I don't have time!" "Do you have time to feel like crap?", was the reply.

I encourage you to try all of these practices, and see which ones fits best for you. As your life changes over time, your self-care practices will evolve as well.

I am always delighted to hear feedback. You can leave feedback at NicoleChristinaLCSW@gmail.com.

1. Simple Pause

Inserting breathing pauses into your day helps you feel more in control, and more peaceful. Next time you are at a stoplight, or brushing your teeth, for example, take three breaths into your belly. Abdominal breathing signals your brain that you are safe and your body can relax. This is my go-to. It is amazing how powerful this exercise is, and it is easy and free!

2. Put It Down!

I'm embarrassed to admit how addicted I am to my phone. I comfort myself by saying that I'm not as addicted as the woman sitting next to me at a recent concert who texted through the entire show. But I have taken to leaving my phone behind when I take dog walks because I can't trust myself to ignore its pinging. Even if it's just for five minutes, give yourself the gift of freedom. It's weird at first, but I think you will find it liberating.

3. Nature Heals

In Japan, there's a practice known as forest bathing. This beautiful expression simply means walking in the woods quietly, appreciating the beauty. Interestingly, people who spend time among trees develop an immunity that is created by a chemical given off by the trees. "Nature deficiency" has been seen in children who live in urban areas and don't get outside. Some of us don't have easy access to woods, but we can notice clouds, plants poking up through the concrete, the way the light changes.

You can't appreciate nature and worry at the same time. Challenge yourself to see beauty as you go about your day. Stay with the feeling and let it soak in. For more on this, check out Rick Hanson's books.

4. It May Be Corny, But...

Gratitude is the closest relative to happiness. It's hard to feel overwhelmed when you are counting your blessings. Plenty of research demonstrates the power of appreciating what we already have. The most effective way to make this work is to keep it personal, specific, and a little quirky. For more on this subject, check out Richard Emmons' work.

5. Kindness Pays

It turns out that when we are kind, our bodies and minds feel good. As mammals, we are wired to connect emotionally with our tribe. You will find that making eye contact with your grocery check out person or mail carrier feels good.

6. "Whatever"

Martha Beck calls her "higher power" "*Whatever*." I tell my clients that they can call it whatever they want--God, Higher Power, Divine, or Nature. Knowing that there is something bigger out there, something connecting us all, puts our daily worries in perspective. At difficult times in my life, I have gone outside at night and just looked at the stars. Remind yourself that scientists have known this for a long time. The movie *Avatar* was just the beginning.

7. Meals As Holidays

Who doesn't eat and multi-task? It's the American way. Did you know that when you are on screens and not paying attention to your eating that you don't metabolize the nutrients as well? And that you will eat 40% more because you are not aware of your satisfaction cues? Challenge yourself to eat one meal or snack in quiet. No screens, magazines, or list-making. You might be surprised to see how odd it feels. Use mealtime as a resting period--a mini holiday.

If this is too difficult, pay attention to your first sip of coffee or tea in the morning. Savor it. Appreciate it. You will be surprised how delightful this is!

8. You Don't Need a FitBit

Spend some time each day moving.

It doesn't have to be fancy. It

could be walking the dog,

gardening, or mowing the lawn. Our

bodies are designed to move.

Exercise is essential for good mental

health, as well as keeping our

bodies flexible. You don't need a

FitBit. Just get your body off the

couch.

9. An Old Notebook Will Do

Many people find that writing down their worries helps "get it out of their heads." It can also be helpful to have a written record of what is difficult so patterns can be found and addressed. Forget grammar and punctuation. Some people find writing with their opposite writing hand helps things flow more spontaneously.

10. It's Not Relaxing-- It's Numbing

Most people watch several hours of TV a day. They might think it's a way to relax, but depending on what they are watching, it's just more stimulation for an already rattled nervous system. I once had a client who had a terrible time sleeping. When I asked her what she did before bed, the answer to her problem became clear; she was binge-watching Law and Order! Instead of numbing out in front of the tube, Choose something that is restorative.

11. Maria Had It Right

Maria Montessori believed that children can't think or learn when there is clutter. A big part of her educational system was teaching children to clean up after themselves. In fact, many adults find that when their space is neat and tidy, they feel more calm. Most Americans have mountains of unused items. These items cost us by distracting us from what is essential. Space in one's closet is worth a lot. Throwing away our stuff may seem overwhelming. Start small.

12. Facebook Isn't A Real Friend

What comes over us when we start scrolling down our FB feed? How does time simply disappear? How much is really interesting or useful? Try giving yourself a time limit on how much you consume of this guilty pleasure. It's a lot like cotton candy--it tastes good, but it has little nutritional value.

13. Simple Soup

Sometimes when we are feeling stressed, it's helpful to go back to the basics. Treating ourselves like we have the flu and need to be pampered can be very restorative. Writer Anne Lamott calls this making a "cruise ship." She creates a comfortable place on her couch with pillows where she can reach everything, and she reads magazines until she feels refreshed.

Making a very simple soup of broth and rice or noodles can have the same soothing effect.

MY NOTES

For more information on burnout and stress reduction, head over to my website at NicoleChristina.com and take a look at recent articles I've written on the subject.