

Conquering Self-Care



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LIFESTYLE | Conquering Self-Care

Self-care is an often-used phrase that has been applied to a million different activities. But how do we distinguish exactly what self-care is? The simplest way to explain self-care is to compare it to caring about yourself in the way you would a loved one.

With the rise of mental health awareness, it's become more normal to treat ourselves a bit more gently. We may let ourselves linger in the sunlight a bit longer or draw ourselves a warm bath after a hard day. Day by day, we remind ourselves to choose self-love and release our inner critic.

The phrase "self-care" tends to be thrown around loosely. And, as with any other phrase popularized by pop psychology and social influencers, the notion of self-care can be misused if placed in the wrong context. For instance, a person could cite self-care when they say they are creating boundaries which are merely an excuse to never be there for friends or reciprocate consolation. They may say the emotional labor is too taxing for them. They also might use self-care as an excuse to avoid unpleasant but necessary actions.

Self-care isn't an escape from processing all difficult emotions. It isn't being a bad friend either. It's simply loving yourself enough to do things that your future self will thank you for.

The more glamorous aspects of self-care, such as iced caramel lattes and face masks or massages, are popular "self-care" activities for people to engage in. However, the intricacies of self-care extend well beyond consumerism and aesthetic frivolities.

Self-care doesn't have to be about money, and especially shouldn't be used to jeopardize your finances. The key to sustainable self-care is finding and maintaining effective self-soothing sustainable techniques, many of which require little to no money. For instance, you can do some stretches or yoga poses, take a nice bath or go for a walk. Practice something you enjoy like journaling or drawing. Spend time in nature or with your pets. There's also the option to meditate or give yourself a facial massage.

Incorporating sustainable low-cost at-home self-care into your routines helps bring about a sense of calm to your day, but it also doesn't hurt to treat yourself every so often. This is where introspection comes into play. Many of us internalize deprivation as a virtue and a mindset. Any deviation from that is seen as a weakness. If we grew up in a household of scarcity or were taught never to indulge in nice things, this can last into adulthood, even if we are well-off financially.

Ask yourself if you're making yourself suffer needlessly. Will you look back on your life in a few decades and wish you'd granted yourself a bit more of life's simple pleasures?

The "treat yourself" mindset is about moderation. It's okay, of course, to spend a little extra money on an office chair that doesn't hurt your back and vacations, spa days and manicures do reduce stress for many people. It's also completely understandable to buy yourself a sweet treat once a week so long as you're not breaking the bank.

Making Health a Priority

Care for yourself by fueling your body with nutritious foods and exercising regularly. You don't have to be that person who gets up at 5 a.m. every day for a run. Just do something you enjoy that gets your body moving. Focus less on goals about how your body looks and more on how it feels.

Make sure you're getting enough vitamins and minerals. Supplements are incredibly helpful for those with vitamin deficiencies in their diets. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. It's recommended that you drink at least eight cups a day.

There are also aspects of taking care of your health that sound much less glamorous but are important. Take care of your dental hygiene (that includes flossing) and make sure you're up-to-date with preventative healthcare screening appointments. While these aren't exciting, your future self will still thank you.

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as your physical health. Cultivate positivity by making lists of things you're grateful for or things you like about yourself. Positive affirmations are especially helpful.

SELF
care
IS NOT SELFISH

Most importantly, reach out if your mental load becomes too much to bear alone. It takes strength and mental fortitude to acknowledge when you need help and support. Don't wait until your stress becomes a breakdown to admit you're struggling. You're only human, and you're doing the best you can.

Creating a Life You Don't Need to Escape From

The little things in life do make up a good majority of self-care. But you can't drink lemon water and light scented candles each morning while engaging in choices that are detrimental to your well-being and expect results.

It's essential to enforce boundaries, both emotional and physical, in all your relationships. There are many reasons to set boundaries: to protect your dignity, to preserve your time or to prevent yourself from being overwhelmed or emotionally drained. Unhealthy relationships exist, and if someone consistently disrespects your boundaries, it may be time to cut them off.

Surrounding yourself with people who treat you well and make you feel appreciated is important. Prioritize making connections with these people in your life and spending time with them.

Working in a job that makes you miserable isn't conducive to your self-care practice. Everyone has aspects of their job that stress them out, and we do what we need to earn a living. However, a large majority of your waking week is spent at work.

If your career is negatively impacting your inner peace, it may be time to consider other options and ask yourself a few questions. Could you pursue other career avenues? Would it be worth taking the risk, knowing how unhappy you are currently?

There are stressors life throws at us that we can do nothing about. Sometimes, we're in no position to change them. But examining our circumstances and the alternative options that might make us happier is an integral part of caring for ourselves.

Implementing Self-Care in Your Life

It's never too late to commit to self-care. If the notion feels overwhelming, start by building small habits that will benefit you. If it helps, write out a checklist of ways you can care for yourself daily.

It takes only a few weeks for a practice to become your new normal. While it may be hard to prioritize your wellness at first, it will soon become second nature.

As you start sprinkling small gestures into your daily routine that bring you happiness, you'll see that you are someone worth caring for. You've carried yourself through every phase of life, good and bad. It's time you start appreciating yourself! ☐