



Self-Conscious Self Care: How to Prioritize Your Mental Health



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People often times find themselves making sacrifices

in their lives due to factors such as work, family, finances, and health. Frequently, the first thing to be sacrificed, whether knowingly or not, is self-care. Some signs and symptoms that a person's self-care has diminished include increased irritability, fatigue, anxiety, challenges with sleep, changes in appetite, and adverse effects on relationships with loved ones and colleagues. As the prioritization of mental health has rightfully come to the forefront of pop culture, questions may arise regarding how you can improve your self-care. Ironically, the pursuit of self-care can be anxiety producing in and of itself since it may be unclear where to begin, or what "self-care" actually means.

Acts of self-care can fundamentally improve your mental health by allowing dedicated time away from day-to-day obligations and stressors, while also putting those stressors into perspective. These acts should be established into a consistent routine because the more this practice becomes habitual, the more likely the aforementioned symptoms will diminish. In other words, the more time you take for yourself, the less likely you'll be stressed out by external factors in your life. Realistically, everyone is going to experience some level of stress in their daily lives. It's just a matter of whether those stressors negatively impact your overall personal well-being. Here are best practices for improving your self-care and prioritizing your mental health.

Check-in With Yourself

The first step towards improving your own self-care is reshaping how you view yourself and the challenges you may encounter. Taking a yoga class or having a date night with a loved one can be great acts of self-care, but not if you are preoccupied with ruminating thoughts during those activities. We typically default to viewing these challenges as barriers, but it can be beneficial to view these as opportunities instead. This is easier said than done, and it will take some practice,



but it can be helpful to have that shift in perspective. You can ask yourself, “Is being so hard on myself for experiencing these issues benefiting me and my loved ones? Or would it be more helpful to reframe my challenges as opportunities to improve and move forward.” It frankly would be unusual if any of us didn’t experience these challenges at some point in our lives. It’s just a matter of whether these challenges continue to become a barrier or can they essentially serve as a prompt for you to make some kind of life change in order to take better care of yourself.

Define Your Self-Care

Once you identify your need to prioritize self-care, the next step will be to determine what that means for you personally. One size doesn’t fit all, so it may take some experimentation before you can solidify a plan that works for you. It’s also

important to differentiate between acts of self-care and basic leisure activities. While these can go hand in hand, sometimes people may misconstrue an activity, such as reading a book, exercising, or watching a movie, as self-care. While each of those examples are fun to partake in, you need to also consider how these activities are addressing your immediate concerns. For example, if you are experiencing stress from work leading to negative thoughts, your first basic act of self-care may include writing down your main concerns from work, what you have done to address those issues, and who you can speak to about them. When you have those written down, you can then practice a guided meditation or even a simple conversation with a colleague or loved one to express those thoughts. Some people find it helpful to practice such a technique on a regular basis, whether or not they’re experiencing an immediate stressor. You can also research content that directly addresses what you’re experiencing, such as books, podcasts, or shows, that discuss self-improvement and mental health. Always ask yourself how you feel after these activities and observe how those practices did, or didn’t, improve your overall mood and demeanor.

Seek Support for Your Self-Care

While your personal mental health and well-being are priorities, you may find that your challenges with self-care may be affecting your relationships with loved ones and colleagues.

You are only human so if you are stressed out by any number of factors in your life, and haven't solidified a self-care routine, the first people to bear the burden of your stress, outside of yourself, are your loved ones. Establishing a self-care routine can help you cope independently without having to burden a loved one at the height of your stress. That's not to say that you should not turn to your support systems for help if needed, but you will likely find that acts of self-care can help deescalate your emotionality in the moment before seeking out that support.

Establish Your Self-Care Plan

Lastly, committing to routines and regimens that advance your physical health and well-being can go a long way in improving your overall outlook on life and those daily stressors. Proving to yourself that you are capable of committing to a regimen can increase your self-confidence. Exercising, for example, forces you to focus on your body movements, where your arms are placed, whether you're positioned properly and safely. So, while your mind might naturally wander, you're essentially obligated to be mindful of your body because you are engaging various muscles, joints, tendons, and ligaments all at once. And even if you have something preoccupying your mind, you can use the exercise time as a break from those thoughts. When you return to those thoughts later, they may not feel so heavy or upsetting.



Committing to acts of self-care, no matter how you pursue them, is a way of telling yourself that your mental health and well-being matter. Consistency with these strategies will be essential to see progress. Refining your thought patterns and enhancing your physical health are beneficial steps when pursuing routines that will not only distract you from your daily anxieties, but also have a positive effect on your overall outlook on life. Always remember to tell yourself that your mental health matters more than those stressors in your life, and that you deserve to take time to care for yourself each and every single day.



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