

Flourish with these simple self-care practices

Health and wellbeing are vital for living a full and happy life. We instinctively know that incorporating self-care into our daily lives helps us flourish and reach for our potential. Taking steps to feel fit, healthy and happy seems obvious, but it is another thing to make it happen. Life is busy, and there is always another priority. Often self-care activities are the first things to go when juggling family and work commitments.

Here are some common issues that I encounter in my wellbeing coaching practice, together with some positive steps to help address them:

Genes are not destiny. People often say that how long and healthily they will live is predetermined by their genes. This belief creates inertia as we feel that whatever we do, our destiny is foretold, and there isn't much we can do about it. Professor Tom Kirkwood of the Institute for Ageing and Health at Newcastle University disputes this. He says, "research shows that genetics accounts only for about a quarter of what determines the length of life, meaning that three-quarters is controlled by factors that are under individual control, such as nutrition and lifestyle."

Therefore the steps you take today can secure great benefits in terms of healthy ageing by promoting a robust immune system. Practical steps can include moving more and being open to new experiences. Having a healthy diet, getting enough rest and being sociable is also essential. Being social may sound optional, but it is vital as loneliness causes stress, which lowers immunity. There may be genetic determinants of length and quality of life, but environment and behaviour matter too.

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Tame your inner critic. Being ambushed by the voice of your 'inner critic' can often derail good intentions. Watch out for negative self-talk that tells you it isn't worth the effort and, in any case, you won't stick at it. Notice when this happens and the effect it has upon you. Think about the encouraging words that your 'inner mentor' would say instead to support and energise you. Remember that thoughts are just thoughts until you choose to act upon them.

Practice self-compassion. Learning how to be self-compassionate can improve self-esteem and increase motivation while contributing to health and wellbeing. According to studies, self-compassion has many benefits. These include the reduction of self-criticism, lowering stress hormones like cortisol and increasing self-encouragement. Being self-compassionate means accepting that you are worthy of living a happy life just as you are. Too often people beat themselves up for not being this or that. Don't fall for that trap. Introduce changes that enhance your health and wellbeing because you care about yourself as a supportive friend might. Now you have a solid foundation upon which to build.

You can't pour from an empty cup. Some fall prey to the belief that taking time to work on self-care is selfish and that time should be spent nurturing others. It helps to remember that you can only be useful to others if you first take care of yourself. By incorporating self-care activities into your routine, like going for a walk in a green space or reading a book for pleasure, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate. Then you are better resourced to show up fully to spend time with the people you love and do the things that make you happy.

Mitigate the negativity bias. Our self-efforts can derail by the natural human tendency that we have to focus on what's not working. This tendency is called the **negative bias**. We're tough on ourselves, focusing on perceived imperfections. Unchecked, this can lead to an unhelpful

attitude that doesn't support a healthy lifestyle. As psychologist Dr Rick Hanson says, "In effect, the brain is like Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones."

However, research has repeatedly shown that when we are thankful for the good in our lives, we can fight the negativity bias. By purposely showing gratitude, we boost our mood at the moment and bolster our resilience for when times are tough. Grateful people tend to be happier, healthier and more fulfilled. A recent study from the University of Manchester found that people who expressed gratitude tend to sleep better and felt more energetic with an increased focus to achieve what they want to in life.

It isn't challenging to do, but it does take practice. Just try to notice **three good things** that happen as you go about your daily routine. These don't have to be big things - just something that energised you, made you smile, allowed you to see the brighter side of life. You need to spend only a few minutes several times a week to realise the benefit. Be specific about when you do this so that it is more likely to become a good habit. The modern world bombards us with images of perfection. It is easy for our thoughts to spiral into negativity. Taking time to notice the good things in life can help to shift your focus and redress the balance.

Dealing with the attraction of distraction. There is always time to scroll social media or browse the internet or watch TV. It can be a shock when you audit how you spend your time and realise the attraction of distraction is filling the space where self-care might be. Take a practical approach. Decide on one thing that you will do today to enhance your wellbeing. It doesn't have to take a lot of time.

You might like to try the **2-minute Rule** to introduce a new self-care habit. Suggested by James Clear, author of the best-selling book 'Atomic Habits', the 2-minute Rule makes it easier to

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adopt new habits by breaking down the activity into bite-sized chunks. The idea is that you can distil most things to a mini-version lasting 2-minutes. For example, if you want to read more rather than saying you will read a book a week, start by committing to reading one page a night. This way, you build easily achievable habits, and the success will spur you on to do more. Once you have read a page, you are likely to continue. You set yourself up for success. The Rule works because getting started is the first and most important step towards doing something.

Take a moment to reflect upon the importance of self-care. What will you choose to do today that contributes to your health and wellbeing? Take that first step, and you are already on your way to develop smart habits that allow you to flourish.

About Beverly Landais

Beverly is a professional certified coach (PCC). Beverly comes to coaching from a senior business background, including board level. Her purpose is simple. She works with people to help them be at their resourceful best. She can help you do the things that promote wellbeing, bring personal as well as professional satisfaction and make you happy.

Sources:

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