Many people fail to recognize the need for self care and go through life leaving themselves last. Even when people know they are craving time out, they often complain that they do not have enough time to practice self care. But embracing simple ideas and identifying suitable activities we can create daily self care practices that can take as little as 5 minutes of our time. Some practices that take longer might be better as part of our weekly routine.

The truth is, even with limited time and a busy schedule, there are still many options we can engage in to nourish ourselves if we prioritise our need for self care. Even just finding time for simple solitude and silence by being on our own for a while can give us time to reflect and relax. For example, the simplicity of what I call a “conscious cuppa” (see below) can be highly nourishing for our inner self and create a moment of pause in our busy day.

Obviously, it is important to practice any of the following activities with a clear focus and intention on them being part of our self care regime and the benefits they are bringing us, rather than just going through the motions. Try to find time each day to do one or two of the basic shorter practices and maybe schedule in time for a longer practice once or twice a week. The trick with creating any new habit is to be disciplined and committed – so giving yourself a specific schedule or weekly timetable is the best chance of it happening.
SELF CARE PRACTICES

Journaling
Journaling is one of my favourite self care activities. Journaling brings more awareness and perspective on the stream of thoughts that constantly bombard our mind. By creating space and time to journal we can reflect on our life in a structured way and often gain valuable insights. Try a practice of 5-10 minutes of journaling, once or twice a day. You can bookend your day with this practice – by doing it first thing in the morning or last thing at night. The morning journal entry can be setting your intentions for the day or recording a dream you had. Whatever feels fresh and alive for you to explore. The last entry of the day can be a reflection on the day or what is currently in your inner landscape.

Meditation, Prayer, Affirmations
Meditation is well known as the best exercise for the mind & spirit, but it also brings many benefits for our physical being as well. Simple breathing practices can be learnt by anyone. Our breath is always available to us, to focus on and will help to get in touch with our body and the present moment.

Engaging in any form of meditation and prayer practices allows our minds to get a break from the constant chatter that fills up our daily lives, both from internal & external sources. The result is clarity of thought, increased ability to concentrate, a sense of calm and tranquillity that can all serve to alter the way we perceive or act in stressful situations. We live our lives from a more centred place and it is easier to take time to prioritise the important things in life.

Affirmations are essentially statements of how you want to be or what you wish to affirm or attract into your life. When saying an affirmation, it is important to visualize your desired state and also get in touch with the feeling of what that will be like. Affirmations can be powerful statements of intention and are a good way of programming the subconscious to bring what we want into our lives. Psychological Kinesiology (psych-K) is a tool that I use in clinic to help people remove the subconscious and unconscious blocks and limiting beliefs that are holding them back.
Yoga, Tai Chi & Qi Gong
Yoga and Tai Chi and Qi Gong are ancient practices that are great relaxation techniques for body, mind and spirit both calming and invigorating, helps to release blocked energy and get us more into our physical bodies. They promote flexibility in our body but also our mind. After learning these through a course, you can easily bring some basic stretches, postures or routines into your daily life.

Massage, Self Massage & Baths
Massage is a fabulous tool for relaxing tired, aching muscles and keeps you in touch with your body and provides some time out for the mind. While engaging the services of a professional massage or spa treatment is a great way to practice self care, exploring self massage treatments is also another way of nourishing the physical body with conscious touch. Many of us are disconnected from our body and take it for granted or alternately, we judge and criticize our body, our weight and other aspects for being unattractive.

Having a foot bath and then massaging your feet and hands is a simple home practice to honour yourself. Likewise, rubbing a lovely oil or cream all over your body after your evening shower – paying attention to your body and lovingly giving thanks for each part and all it does for you is a powerful tool to foster self care, self love and acceptance.

Taking a bath at the end of a long day can be a very simple but nourishing activity to reconnect and slow down. It is almost impossible to enter a nice warm bath without audibly sighing and letting go on some level. Using Epsom salts or essential oils can enhance the bath experience. Lemon foot baths are also a great way to invigorate us and reconnect back into an integrated body/mind/spirit.

NB: Specific instructions for lemon footbaths can be found here: http://karenmcelroy.com.au/lemon-foot-bath/
Cooking Healthy Foods & Mindful Eating

Eating a nutritious diet, with regular well-balanced meals that include fresh whole foods will help you cope better with stress and is a perfect way of practicing self care. Preparing good healthy food is one of the best ways we can truly nourish ourselves and in particular our physical body and being aware of our food habits and emotional eating patterns is a great way to transform our health.

- Nutrient dense foods are essential to give your body the full spectrum of nourishment it needs to function efficiently under stress.
- Eat regular meals with protein such as eggs, nuts, seeds, meats, legumes and quality fats to ensure you blood sugar is stable and you stay calm.
- Avoid sugar, alcohol, soft drinks, caffeine and refined grains such as breads, pastries etc to help prevent blood sugar swings and avoid inflammation and stress.

The “Conscious Cuppa”

- This lovely little practice I created is where we focus on the simple ceremony of preparing and drinking a cup of tea with mindfulness and attention. Using a proper tea pot and a nice cup can add to the aesthetic appeal. Obviously choosing a medicinal tea and drinking the tea somewhere pleasing to the eye will further add to the experience and benefits. Slow down and really taste the tea and ponder with gratitude how sometimes the simple things in life are the best!

Go Organic

- Buy organic foods, go to farmer’s markets and pay attention to where your food comes from and the impact on the planet and your being.

Mindful Eating

- Also be mindful of eating with presence – slow down, chew your food, taste it, have gratitude for your meal. See my article for extra support and tips on this topic http://karenmcelroy.com.au/mindful-eating/
Time in nature, Earthing and Gardening

Nature is a wonderful healer and by tuning into the natural world, the seasons and weather are all powerful ways of slowing down and being more mindful. Watching the sun rise or gazing at the stars helps shift our focus out of our small lives to a bigger perspective.

Earthing

Earthing is a specific practice to help improve our physical and emotional health. Standing on grass barefoot or on dirt, stones, or sand or even hugging a tree can all conduct the earth’s electromagnetic energy field into our body and can help to rebalance our energy. Aside from the known physiological benefits, most people (and all children!) recognise that it simply feels good to have their bare feet on the earth!

For more inddepth information about earthing, see my article: http://karenmcelroy.com.au/benefits-earthing/

Gardening

Gardening is a great way to get in touch with nature in your own backyard and can keep you marveling at the mystery of life. Slowing down and tuning in and getting our hands dirty in the soil can really help us to feel more content and peaceful. Even a simple veggie patch with a few culinary herbs and lettuces can be a rewarding way to nourish yourself – both physically and emotionally.

Music, Dance and Playing Instruments

Music can create a mood and ambience to any situation and has been used for thousands of years in every culture to enrich or reflect the creative and social fabric of life. Different types of music will help to shift our mood and we can access different emotional states.

Dancing is a great way to lose yourself to the moment, get out of your head and get in touch with your body. For me, dancing is one of the best ways of expressing myself and dropping out of mental chatter. Likewise, playing an instrument engages with our mind in a very focused way and can help to drop out of our busyness and simply be in the moment.
Art
Taking time out to put pencil or paint on paper is a great way of tuning into the self and exploring the inner life. You can use your imagination to create something meaningful with drawing or painting and be open to see what comes when you let the mind wander. Explore colour, texture and surfaces to see how they can capture the inner mood and help to release stress and tension.

Craft - knitting/crocheting/hand sewing
Many simple handcraft practices can be used as meditative exercises as well. Even though your hands are busy creating something which brings its own reward and enjoyment, there is a lovely hypnotic quality to repetitive tasks that can free your mind to slow down and relax as well. Dive in and explore these often forgotten crafts as a soul care time out activity.

Questions to consider after you have started to incorporate more self care practices into your life:
- Do you feel more engaged in life, more present or mindful?
- Do you feel more inner peace and calm?
- Are you feeling more connected to yourself or a power bigger than you?
- Are you making healthier choices with your diet or lifestyle?
- Has the quality of your relationships improved?
- Do you feel like life has more meaning?

www.karenmcelroy.com.au

Karen McElroy
NATUROPATH & MEDICAL HERBALIST

© Karen McElroy 2017