



The Importance of Self-care

When I am working with coaching clients, we will often discuss the importance of self care. So why is this so important? I believe one of the first steps to realising our potential is to prioritise looking after our health and wellbeing. Simply put, if we are to achieve all that we are capable of, we need a good supply of energy that will provide the fuel for living life to the fullest. This article contains some key information on self-care including a well-being assessment, and some hints and tips for taking better care of ourselves

Our bodies are like cars. We need fuel in order to keep going on our journey. The quicker we go, the more fuel we will consume. If you let the fuel run right down to the dregs, it's not good for the engine, so it's better to take time out to refuel before the red light comes on! We also need to consider ongoing maintenance. Neglect caring for the car and it won't be long before you break down. Regular checks on oil and water levels, tyre pressure and brake pads, and a thorough annual service, keeps the car going for longer (and helps to retain value).

Our bodies are the same – we need to consider the quality of the fuel (food and water) we are putting in. We also need to take time out to make the regular checks and a thorough health check once a year will help us to maintain and even increase our energy levels.

Traditionally, putting ourselves first can be seen as selfish. Many religions advocate self sacrifice. But how can we serve others if we are unhealthy, tired, or ill. Think about the safety announcement in aeroplanes. We are advised to put on our own oxygen masks before assisting others. We need to take care of ourselves first so we can better support the welfare of others.

The impact of stress

Your ability to manage the day-to-day stresses in your life will help you to determine the level of long-term success in your life. How you deal with stress has a direct impact on how you feel about yourself and how you are perceived by others. In addition, and more importantly, stress has been shown to affect long term health and well-being and is a determining factor in longevity.

According to Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) individual susceptibility to stress includes the following factors:

- Competence in doing the job
- Lifestyle
- Personality
- Ability and opportunity to relax
- Personal susceptibility
- Support and training at work
- Physical health and fitness
- Support from family and friends



WARNING FEATURES AND COMPLAINTS ASSOCIATED WITH STRESS

<p style="text-align: center;">Physical Complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Indigestion • Palpitations • Breathlessness or shallow breathing • Nausea • Muscle twitches • Tiredness • Vague aches or pains • Skin irritations or rashes • Susceptibility to allergies • Excessive sweating • Clenched fists or jaw • Faintness • Frequent colds, 'flu or other infections • Recurrence of previous illnesses • Constipation or diarrhoea • Rapid weight gain or loss 	<p style="text-align: center;">Behavioural Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsociability • Restlessness • Loss of appetite or overeating • Drinking more alcohol or coffee • Smoking more • Taking work home more often • Too busy to unwind, relax; lack of usual exercise • Not looking after oneself • Lying to cover up failure to meet deadlines • Impaired productivity and time structuring, including unpunctuality • Accident prone • Bad driving • Impaired speech, including unusual hesitancy or voice tremor • Increase in domestic problems • Withdrawing from supportive relationships
<p style="text-align: center;">Mental Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indecision • Memory failing, particularly short-term memory • Loss of concentration; easily distracted • Bad dreams or nightmares • Worrying • Muddled thinking • Making mistakes • Less intuitive • Increased sensitivity – more easily offended or upset • Persistent negative thoughts • Impaired judgement 	<p style="text-align: center;">Emotional Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability and resentment • More suspicious, feeling threatened or alienated • More gloomy or depressed • Feeling nervous, apprehensive, anxious and tense • Drained, no enthusiasm, lack of motivation • Cynical or inappropriate humour • Loss of confidence; poor self esteem • Poor quality of life, including job dissatisfaction



Taking time out for ourselves is not selfish but an essential part of maintaining a healthy mind, body and spirit. Whether this involves a game of squash, an occasional massage, gardening or a spa day or some quiet time alone, make sure wherever possible, YOU take care of YOU. If we are calm and nurtured we are much better able to cope with the demands of a busy life.

Extreme Self-Care

Even when our lives are in balance and we have an effective strategy for dealing with every day stress, there are unavoidable periods in our lives and work where demands and pressures are considerably higher than usual.

There are also some events that may have taken place in your life over the past year (or even longer) that can have a significant impact on your health and wellbeing. These events include:

- Death of spouse or partner
- Divorce or separation
- Death of family members
- Personal injury or illness
- Redundancy

Some of the “happy” events can also have a major effect including:

- Marriage
- Pregnancy or birth of a child
- Moving house

Even annual events such as Christmas and holidays can be an additional drain on our systems. At these times, we need more resilience and need to take extra care of ourselves – time for “extreme self-care”! This means creating more space for rest and relaxation, choosing the healthiest dietary options, exercising regularly and avoiding toxins such as alcohol, caffeine and drugs. Not always easy to do at challenging times in our lives, but of the greatest importance if we and especially our bodies are to get through unscathed.

Listed below are some hints and tips for taking care of YOU including more detailed suggestions on healthy eating and relaxation. Find ways to incorporate these into your life on a daily basis. Remember, our energy is like a bank account. We need to make regular investments and save for the rainy days. If we continue to draw down more than we invest, we will soon become overdrawn (and withdrawn!).

Make choices today that will support your lifestyle now and the person you are already becoming.



PERSONAL WELL-BEING - TAKING CARE OF YOU

<p>Physically</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care for your body • Eat nutritiously – your food is your fuel for life • Exercise Regularly – if the gym is not for you, find something you really enjoy • Take time to relax • Sleep well
<p>Emotionally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time with friends who refresh you • Be of service to the community – deeper meaning can come to your life through giving to others • Connect to your family • Be aware of your impact on the planet • Share your troubles
<p>Mentally</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in the “now” – be as fully present as you can • Give your brain sustenance (courses, workshops and books) • Apply yourself to problem solving where possible
<p>Spiritually</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to Meditate or just be still • Listen to music that fires your soul coals • When possible spend quality time alone • Connect to nature – get outside when you can • Identify hobbies and leisure interests that access your “flow” state • Take regular time outs – even if just for five minutes



HEALTHY EATING TIPS

At the risk of sounding like a bossy mother, there is no better way for you to take care of yourself than by making a conscious choice about the food you eat. Food provides our energy for life... You are what you eat!

- Buy simple, natural, whole foods rather than processed food. Buy organic where possible for a healthier option
- Eat a balanced diet including complex carbohydrates. Avoid large quantities of acidic foods.
- Try to avoid added salt and sugar and watch for preservatives and additives
- Eat five portions of vegetables per day – at least one should be raw for essential nutrients
- Check out how you are feeling after eating foods. Some food can make you feel lethargic and bloated (eg wheat). To be more certain, you can be screened for allergies and intolerances
- Always take the time to sit down to eat
- Make sure you chew your food properly – there are no teeth in stomachs!
- Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water per day. Avoid drinking for approximately 30 minutes before or after eating as this will affect the digestive process
- Replace tea and coffee with water and herbal teas. There are a wide variety of different fruit and herbal teas available. Your body will feel much better and more balanced without caffeine
- Avoid alcohol, junk food and smoking – these age the body and damage the energy system (But you know that already!)

RELAXATION TIPS

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| • | Start a bedtime routine – a warm bath, lavender oil and camomile tea can do wonders for insomniacs. |
| • | If you find you can't sleep or wake during the night, try writing your thoughts down. A "brain-dump" can clear the mind and ensure restful sleep |
| • | Avoid caffeine, especially at night – this stimulant affects sleep patterns |
| • | Alcohol affects the quality of sleep even in small quantities. Instead of sleeping peacefully, your body is hard at work detoxifying! |
| • | Check your room environment supports effective sleep – if not buy eyeshades or earplugs (especially if you are nearer a snorer!) |
| • | Build relaxation into your lifestyle – try yoga, meditation or walks in nature |
| • | Give yourself some relaxation time before you go on holiday – otherwise you will spend the first few days trying to unwind |
| • | Use deep breathing techniques - Breathe in slowly and steadily to the count of seven; then breathe out slowly and steadily to the count of eleven. Continue with this rhythm of in-breaths and out-breaths until your breathing becomes more relaxed |
| • | Rebalance your posture hourly during prolonged periods of working at your desk by changing position or simply straightening your spine and lowering your shoulders. |
| • | Be kind to yourself. As the Buddha wisely said, "If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete." |



WELL-BEING ASSESSMENT

Relationships	
There are people in my life who continuously drain my energy	
I have unreturned phone calls, e-mails or letters which need to be dealt with	
I have unresolved conflict with a family member	
I lack quality friendships in my life	
There is someone I need to forgive	
I feel a void in my life created by the lack of a romantic partner	
There is a relationship I need to end	
There is a phone call I dread making and it causes me stress and anxiety	
I am currently involved in a relationship which compromises my values	
I miss being part of a loving and supportive community	
Environment	
My car is in need of cleaning/repair	
My wardrobe needs updating and/or alteration	
I'd like to live in a different location	
I have appliances which need repair or upgrading	
My home is not decorated in a way that nurtures me	
My cupboards, basement or attic are cluttered and need to be cleared	
Repairs are needed around my home	
My house is cluttered and disorganised	
I miss having beauty reflected in my environment	
I watch too much television	
Body, Mind, Spirit	
I eat food that's not good for me	
Something about my physical appearance bothers me	
Its been too long since I've been to the dentist	
I don't get the sleep I need to feel fully rested	
I'd like to exercise regularly but I never seem to find the time	
I have a health concern for which I've avoided getting help	
I have emotional needs that consistently go unmet	
There are books I'd love to read but never seem to find the time for	
I lack personal interests that are intellectually stimulating	
I lack spiritual or religious practice in my life	
Work	
I no longer enjoy my job and have a hard time showing up each day	
My work is stressful and leaves me exhausted at the end of the day	
My office is disorganised/my desk is a mess, I have trouble finding what I need	
I'm avoiding a confrontation or conflict at work	
I tolerate bad behaviour from a boss or co-worker	
I lack technical skills and this gets in the way of my productivity	
I lack the proper office equipment that I need to do my job properly	
My work does not allow me to express my creativity	
I know I need to delegate some tasks but I am unable to let go of control	
I feel overwhelmed with the information that enters my life via mail/e-mail/etc	



Money	
I have financial matters which need attention (eg tax return)	
I pay my bills late	
I spend more than I earn	
I don't have a plan for my financial future	
I don't have adequate insurance cover	
My mortgage is too high – I need to refinance	
I have debts that need to be paid off	
My will is not up to date	

WHAT'S ON TOP- ASSESS WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FIRST

Please spend a few minutes noting down the top 10 issues, relationships or situations which need to change first. It is important that you do not allow your conscious mind to edit this list but simply write down the very first things which come into your head. Include here the 10 tasks you feel you need to do now in order to create more space, balance in your life and the energy to do some of the important things in your life. Prioritise the top 3 tasks.

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Individual coaching sessions can provide the support and motivation to achieve the changes you desire and create the life you want to lead.

For further information visit www.tiffanykay.com or telephone 0845 226 7473.

On all you are becoming... And more