



San Diego Hospice & Palliative Care

The Case for Self Care

Self-care has emerged as a hot topic as persons strive to balance their lives. Self-care is defined as combinations of fulfilling activities or quiet moments that allow individuals to rejuvenate their energies and regain their joy for life.

Unfortunately, self-care is not generally supported by our culture, and some people equate self-care with abandoning responsibilities or being self-centered. Persons often receive rave reviews for taking better care of others than they do themselves. For example, we might hear, "Isn't Sarah remarkable, she puts everyone's needs above her own." Or "That Dave, I don't know how he operates on just five hours of sleep a night; isn't he extraordinary?" As a result, many persons are suffering near epidemic levels of physical, emotional and spiritual fatigue.

Taking time for yourself allows you to be a better spouse, parent, friend and volunteer. Consider the following:

Self-care is empowering. When you implement any healthy practice into your routine, you are taking charge of your life. You are the expert on your needs and if you don't acknowledge their importance, who will?

When we are overwhelmed, we lack the energy and focus to make the same clear decisions that we normally would. We are unable to problem solve in a purposeful manner. If we take care of ourselves regularly, we can better handle life's challenges.

We serve as role models for others. When we take care of ourselves, we provide an example of positive esteem and healthy behaviors.

One person described the importance of self care in this way: "I compare the importance of self care to a cup in the sink. As the cup sits there, little by little, it gathers droplets of water. No appreciable stream of water is ever needed to keep it full; there are just enough drops over time to fill it up. That's the way it is with self care; if I take care of myself little by little, I can then give from my reserves and never become empty."

If we do just a few things regularly, to renew our energy and revitalize our spirit, we can continue providing for others from a place of abundance. We have, within us, additional resources to share.

Accept the challenge to try some activities (either calming and reflective, or exhilarating) for the next month. Arrange some time in your schedule for self-care, and notice how much better you feel.

Making Self Care a Reality

Let's focus on some specific ways for defining self-care. Every individual will have a different list. This will depend entirely on you and what makes you feel physically, emotionally and spiritually rejuvenated.

We often see television commercials that equate self-care with relaxing in a quiet bath, filled with plenty of hot water and bubbles. You know, "Calgon, take me away". And the couple whose lives were changed by taking a Caribbean cruise. Or, the endless Internet companies that entice you to spend hours online for intellectual fulfillment. There's nothing wrong with any of these, as long as they serve as your definition of nurturing practices. Ask yourself, "What activities am I most passionate about? What pastimes do I get so caught up in that I lose track of time? What hobbies leave me feeling energized about life and more connected to myself?"

Are you at a loss for ideas? Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*, suggests making some lists--

List five hobbies that sound fun.

List five classes that sound fun.

List five skills that would be fun to have.

List five things that you used to enjoy doing.

List five silly things that you would like to try once.

Or you might try Jennifer Louden's, author of *The Comfort Queen's Guide to Life*, recommendation to complete the following sentence fifty times and see what it stirs in you: "I never have time to ____ anymore."

After completing these exercises you will have new ways to take care of yourself. The thing to remember is that there are no wrong answers here because it's completely about what makes you feel more joyful in life.

There are also pastimes called *shadow comforts*. This is a term that Jennifer Louden uses for activities that can look like self-care but isn't truly comforting to you. Sure reading a magazine is better than doing the laundry, but do you really enjoy the process? It is relaxing to spend an hour on the computer after dinner, but would spending the time differently nourish your spirit? Making these distinctions might help you choose how to spend your precious time.

Are you asking, "How am I going to add time for self care with everything else that I'm juggling in my life?" That answer will take some time, reflection and prioritizing on

your part. One suggestion might be to negotiate self-care time with your spouse or friend. Ask them, "If I take the children to soccer practice while you play tennis on Monday night, can you take them on Wednesday night so I can take a watercolor class?" Or, if you are a single parent, do you have a friend that will swap babysitting time? In other words, think of ways to meet both parties' goals for self-nurturing time.

Most importantly, avoid looking at self-care as something else to squeeze into an already crowded schedule. Persons who take care of themselves lead healthier, more meaningful lives, and each person is responsible to make it work for them.

Nourish yourself. Replenish yourself. If you don't, who will?

--Excerpt from article by Jennifer Snyder, president of The Time of Your Life