

Self Care

How you spend our time and the activities you engage in deeply impact on your state of well-being in the world. Often we find ourselves in mindless activities that do not serve us in any constructive way. By making a list of your activities it will help you become more mindful and also to discriminate between the kinds of activities that serve you and the ones that deplete you. While life will always throw at us activities that tend to deplete us, the aim is not necessarily to avoid them. The challenge is to bring awareness to these activities and to discover if there are ways that you can take care of yourself while engaging in them. On the other hand if there are activities that nourish you, it might be worth exploring if there are ways of incorporating into your life more nourishing activities of this kind.

It is rare for us to stop and take stock of the way we spend our day and it might be useful to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Of the things that I do, what nourishes me, what increases my sense of actually being alive and present, rather than merely existing?
2. Of the things that I do, what drains me, what decreases my sense of actually being alive and present, what makes me feel I am merely existing or worse?
3. Accepting that there are some aspects of your life that you simply cannot change, are you consciously choosing to increase the time and effort you give to nurturing activities, and to decrease the time and effort you give to depleting activities?

By bringing your awareness to all of the activities of your day, mindfulness becomes a lived reality, thereby embracing the richness and struggles of life with openness. You will gradually incorporate into your daily activities that which help you respond more creatively with life. For example you might become aware of the impact that certain foods, music, television etc. have upon you and make clear choices about what you want to imbibe. The following exercise will help you to bring greater awareness to your day to day activities.

Self Care in Daily Activities

1. Make a list of all your daily activities from the time you get up until the time you go to bed.
2. When you have done that- go down the list and categorise each one as:

N - Nurturing activity (something that nourishes you)

D - Draining activity (something that depletes you)

M - Mastery activity (something that may not be pleasant in itself - but feels good after you have completed it)
3.
 - (a) Mindfully choose to increase activities that nurture you.
 - (b) Mindfully choose to decrease activities that deplete you.
4. Track and notice your level of well-being as you consciously put step 3 into practice. You may like to keep a weekly record to enable you to make this practice more conscious.

Segal, Williams, Teasdale 2002

Some Everyday Self-Care Mindfulness Tips

- When you first wake up in the morning before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing, in and out for at least five full breaths.
- Notice your body posture. Be aware of how your body and mind feel when you move from lying down to sitting, to standing, to walking. Notice each time you make a transition from one posture to the next.
- Throughout the day, take a few moments to bring your attention to your breathing for at least five full breaths.
- When you eat or drink something, take a minute and breathe. Bring awareness to seeing your food, smelling your food, chewing your food, and swallowing your food.
- Notice your body while walking or standing. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms, and legs as you walk. Are you rushing to get to the next moment? Even when you are in a hurry, be aware of the hurrying.
- Bring awareness to listening and talking. Can you listen without having to agree or disagree, fall into liking or disliking, or planning what to say when it's your turn? Can you just say what you need to say without overstating or understating it? Can you notice how your mind and body feels? Can you notice what is conveyed by your tone of voice? Is your speaking an improvement on silence?
- When you find yourself waiting in line, use this time to notice standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet on the floor and how your body feels. Bring attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Be aware of any points of tightness in your body throughout the day. See if you can breathe into them, and as you exhale, let go of any excess tension. Be aware of any tension stored in your body. Is there tension in your neck, your shoulders, or in the stomach, the jaw, or in your lower back?
- Focus attention on your daily activities - such as brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, washing up, or putting on your shoes. Bring attention to each activity.
- Before you go asleep at night, take a few minutes and bring your attention to your breathing for at least five full breaths.

Williams M., Teasdale J., Segal Z., Zinn J.K. 2007