

Self-care During Challenging Times

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Does any of this sound familiar? Your income hasn't increased to keep pace with the rising costs of food or rent. You're not sure whether college is the right path for your child, and you're unsure what that might mean for their future. The family car stopped working, and you had to dip into your emergency fund to cover the cost of repairs. You've postponed surgery more than once to take care of responsibilities at work and home, yet you haven't had the chance to focus on your own health.

Life can feel overwhelming at times. Whether you're balancing work, family, health concerns, or unexpected setbacks, it's easy to put your own needs at the bottom of the list. When we don't make time for rest and recovery, stress can take a toll – physically and emotionally. And in a time when healthcare services are often stretched, it's especially important to listen to what your body and mind are telling you.

Even small steps toward self-care can make a big difference. Here are a few gentle reminders that may help you take better care of yourself and the people around you.

1. Set Aside "Me-Time" Every Day

It might seem impossible to carve out time for yourself when your to-do list feels endless. Maybe you're juggling a job, have a pile of laundry to do, and a pet's vet appointment. Still, setting aside even 30 minutes a day – whether it's for a quiet walk in the park, reading a chapter of a good book, or doing something else that rejuvenates you can give you a much-needed moment of peace and perhaps joy. It's not selfish; it's essential.

2. Set Aside "Us-Time"

Relationships thrive when we make time for connection. Whether it's your partner, a parent, a neighbor, or a friend, take the time to do more than exchange passing pleasantries as you run out the door. Instead, check in and really listen or show up when they need a hand. When you're there for someone else, you create shared moments of care and support that benefit both of you. It feels good to be present for someone who is important to you, or even a stranger who you have a brief interaction with.

3. Find Reasons to Smile and Laugh

Some of us have gotten used to covering our smiles with face masks so we may not be smiling as much, but it's still important to find reasons to smile – at ourselves and with others. Go into the bathroom; yes now.

Smile at the mirror. Does it feel unnatural or that your lips are too tight? It's a sign that you may need to smile more. Try watching something funny – a comedy show, or a lighthearted movie. If you are lucky enough to have a friend who cracks great jokes, spend more time with them. Instead of stifling a belly laugh when you are out in public, let your hearty laugh ring out for all to hear – maybe others will join in. Smiling and laughter can lift your mood and reduce stress, so do it often.

4. Try Something Different

Routines are comforting, but a small change can offer a fresh perspective. If you always drive the same route to work or to the store, taking a new route can become an unexpected adventure. You may notice brilliant spring flowers blooming or see a bakery you've never tried so you stop in to treat yourself to a warm cookie that's just out of the oven. Maybe you'll see a Little League game and pull over to watch an inning. You don't have to spend a lot of money or time to add a little sparkle to your day.

5. Learn Something New

When life feels heavy, learning something new can add a bounce of excitement to your day. Maybe try your hand at quilting, plant tomatoes in a raised garden, or explore a new language – especially one that's spoken by neighbors or people in your community. Being curious and learning new things doesn't need to be formal to be enriching.

6. Find Your Voice

Do you want to feel heard? Of course you do. Sometimes, it helps to know that your thoughts and experiences matter. You might choose to write a letter to your local paper, speak at a community meeting or give testimony at the State House either in-person or virtually. It can be deeply meaningful to do something that contributes to positive change. Volunteer opportunities come in all shapes and sizes, from one-day events to ongoing commitments. You might help out at a hospital, support a health organization, or read with children at a local school.

The world can feel uncertain, and challenges come in many forms. While self-care won't solve every problem, it can help you build strength and resilience to better navigate whatever comes your way. Taking time for yourself and for others. It's a powerful way to stay hopeful and engaged.