



# Looking out for number

people. When we have money, we can take a spa break, hire someone to do the cleaning, buy **any little treat** that might make us **feel better**. Or on a daily basis it can include things as mundane as tidying up after oneself, cooking at home, prioritising exercise, organising a cupboard – anything that **makes life easier** in the long run.

Taking care of yourself is **fundamental** – it's about putting yourself and your needs **first**. But this doesn't have to equal selfishness. If you've ever been on an airplane, you've no doubt heard (and many times ignored) the safety instructions issued at the beginning of every flight: "In the case of an emergency, put on your own mask first". The logic is simple – if you can't breathe, you can't help those travelling with you who may need your assistance. The same is true in life: if you can't function, **move freely, love yourself**, how can you **help yourself and, subsequently, others?**

writer **Kinzie**,

We all have the same amount of time available to us.

The question is how we choose to spend it.

## a vicious circle

When we're bone tired at the end of an especially long day, we come home and flop on the sofa, find solace in the comfort of junk food, consume whatever appears in front of us on the television, drop our clothes on the floor and crawl into bed. The consequences of those choices are obvious the next morning when we wake up to the mess in the bedroom, living room and kitchen.

Then we have another choice. We can berate ourselves for last night's choices, or we can accept that the decision was made in the interest of self-care. We may have the energy in the morning to tidy up. Or we may choose to leave it until later. But making the decision to put off the tidying up, again and again, can lead to a vicious circle of disrespect to ourselves as our living environment deteriorates.

As our body misses proper nourishment and exercise, and our home becomes cluttered, we eventually become lethargic. And then the self-abuse will begin as we start judging ourselves as lazy, fat, messy – fill in the blank. No one can criticise us as well as we can aim bitter diatribes at our own selves.

We may begin the search for someone or something to help us feel better. Shopping, television, alcohol, drugs and sex are popular choices for escaping this self-inflicted pain. Our vulnerable self cringes at the very thought of criticism, much less rejection, from anyone important to us, so we engage in activities to avoid our own discomfort or conflict.

Over time, our very personality can take on the characteristics developed out of this tendency of avoidance. We may even confuse pleasing others with being self-less. However, "an individual who needs to please is constantly trying to see how others are feeling so that s/he will know how to be with them," says author Gary Zukhav in his international bestsellers on emotional awareness, *The Heart of the Soul*.



## breaking the circle

In a world of stress-related illnesses, addictions and light-speed lifestyles, expert advice on living well, being happy and enjoying success comes from every angle. When your mother taught you not to be selfish, she didn't mean to look after everyone else first. Today, some people are so worried about appearing selfish, they lose all sight of self-care. When you can't take care of yourself, you are of absolutely no use to anyone else in your life. Your boss, colleagues, partner, children, friends, lover, even your parents will benefit from your decision to take care of yourself first. Only then can you bring the best of you to your life, your work and your relationships.

Only by beginning to take steps towards being good to ourselves can we authentically be good to others. As we are individuals, those steps are different for each of us.

## socialise

Playtime with friends is just as important as your exercise regime. We are more connected and less connected than ever before. Hiding behind computer terminals and text messages creates an effective avoidance strategy. Beyond the physical challenges of hunching at a desk, the personal cost of digital connectivity can be extremely high. Physical contact can be as challenging as it is rewarding but there is no replacement for personal intimacy in our lives. Nurturing a friendship is not the same as having 500 or more friends on Facebook. As human beings we are naturally social animals. Asking for support may be difficult but living without it can be devastating.

## time out

Once in a while taking a time-out from your rigid schedule might be the best way you can take care of yourself. Whether you're buying peace, quiet and pampering from a spa, removing yourself from urban noise by taking a walk along the beach or simply getting an early night, arranging some me-time is good for you. The world won't stop, your friends won't forget you, your family will understand.



## exercise

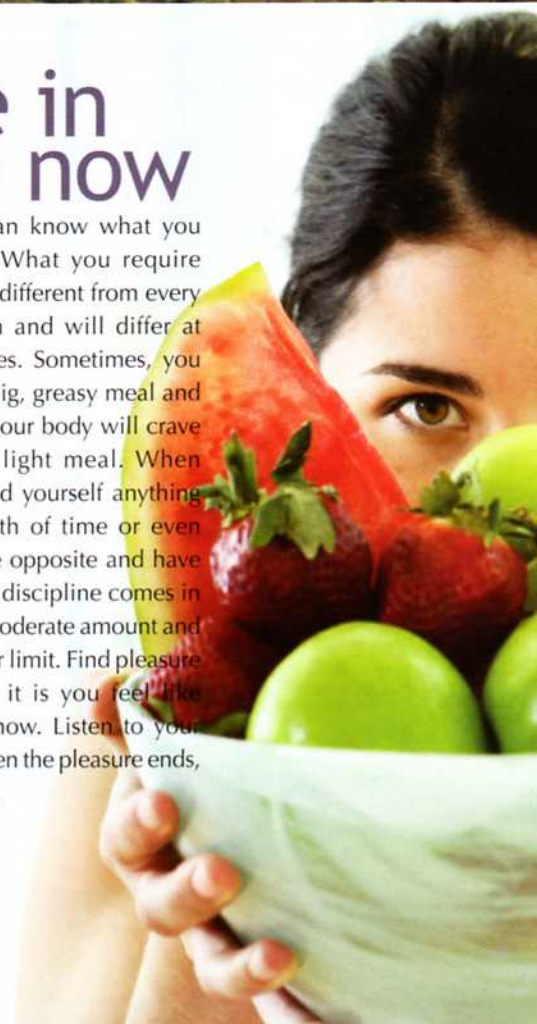
Physically, regular exercise – the gym, yoga, outside sports and team games – bring strength, endurance and energy when you need it. It keeps your body and mind healthy, helps fight physical and mental fatigue and therefore is quite literally instrumental in keeping us going. At the most basic level you can think of, right up to keeping us looking and feeling young, exercise is essential.

But whatever your choice, any fitness routine can also become an obsession when you're not balancing the activity with having fun.



## live in the now

Only you can know what you need most. What you require may well be different from every other person and will differ at different times. Sometimes, you will want a big, greasy meal and other times your body will crave a balanced light meal. When you've denied yourself anything for any length of time or even the complete opposite and have gorged on it, discipline comes in choosing a moderate amount and knowing your limit. Find pleasure in whatever it is you feel like doing right now. Listen to your body and when the pleasure ends, stop doing it.

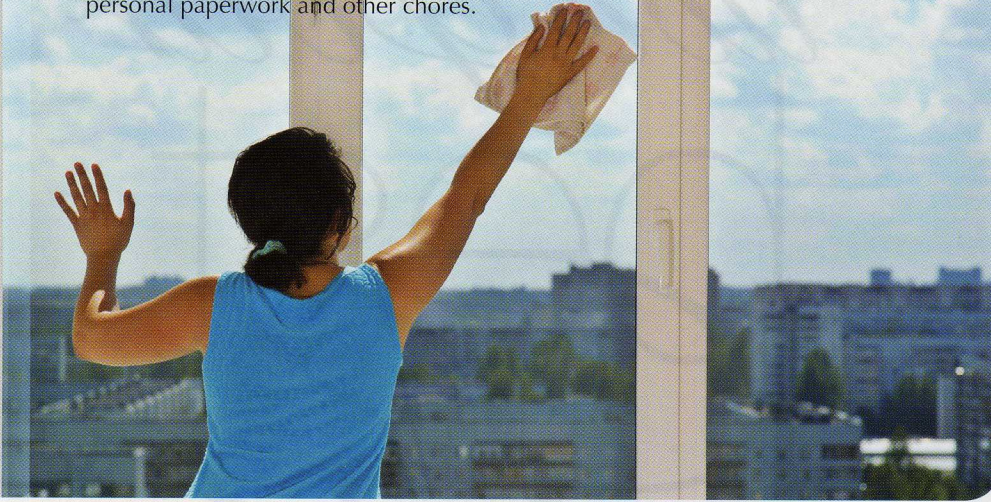


# appreciate yourself

It is frighteningly easy to forget how to appreciate being alone when perpetually interacting with people and arrangements. However, being busy and surrounded by others can be used to mask an internal loneliness or hide a damaged self-esteem. An unhealthy relationship can be the most isolating experience. Actively enjoying your own company is the only replacement for loneliness.

# home maintenance

The rewards for self-care are limitless. Coming home to a clean personal space is sweet when you made the effort to tidy up after yourself. Maintain at least one clear surface where you can readily sit down to enjoy a nice meal or write a letter to someone you love using a real pen and paper. Knowing where everything is helps life flow more smoothly too, and avoids any nasty shocks when it comes to personal paperwork and other chores.



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No one else can repair the damage we inflict upon ourselves.  
No one can take care of us the way we can take care of ourselves.

# above all, balance your life

Taking care of yourself is no more complicated than experiencing balance in your life. For every amount of time you spend on the left side of the balance sheet (giving your time and energy to others), commit time to the right (taking time and energy for yourself). This is not an exercise in judgement or criticism. The secret to balance is being aware of your choices and knowing what you need after a stressful project at work or a series of sleepless nights. Meditation is the easiest way to connect with your own knowing. Sitting in stillness for as little as ten minutes every morning will help you get the most *for* yourself and *from* yourself every single day.

do something special for yourself with that time. Worrying about something you're not doing after you've decided not to do it is not only stressful, it is emotionally and physically draining. Before long, you'll run out of energy to enjoy your life or your friends or your favourite indulgence.

Remember, put on your own mask first