

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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For so many, 2020 has posed some of the greatest challenges of our lifetime. Turning the calendar page to 2021 is a time to remind yourself to take good care of YOU in the New Year. The faculty at Palo Alto University, which is dedicated to psychology and counseling, developed this list of 21 meaningful ways to make 2021 a more balanced year for you.

- **Practice self-compassion.** Many people are good at showing compassion to others, especially during the pandemic, but not as good at being compassionate to themselves. Self-compassion gives us space to breathe and take the time to take care of ourselves in a healing and kind way.
- **Take care of your basic needs.** When we are tired, hungry, and/or sedentary, our mood can dip. Prioritize sleep by going to bed earlier and getting 7-9 hours of sleep a night; Eat consistent balanced meals and walk outdoors for 20 minutes three times a week.
- **Be present.** If you find yourself reliving the past or worrying about the future, try to bring yourself back to the present moment using your senses. Notice five things that you see, four things that you feel, three things that you hear, two things that you smell, and one thing that you taste - and then proceed with your day.
- **Watch your breathing.** So often we think of self-care as activities we do after work or home responsibilities to compensate for daily stressors. **Self-care means doing activities throughout your day, during work and home responsibilities, to achieve calm and emotional balance.** The simple act of watching our breath throughout the day and noting how we feel can alert us to times and opportunities for taking care of ourselves.
- **Pick a few simple, easy goals.** This is something that helps when the drudge of Zoom calls, being isolated at home and missing family and close friends gets you down. If you are feeling stuck at home, accomplish a few activities you would not normally have time for like reorganizing a closet, purging old emails, or planning a new exercise regimen.
- **Take an early morning walk.** Spend each day on an early morning walk listening to Podcasts, your favorite music or learning a new language.
- **Maintain a daily plan that puts you first.** Take the time to put yourself and your own needs first. Are you adding some fun to your life? Are you staying connected to those who are important to you? By creating a space for yourself, it will make it easier to continue to support others.
- **Write a letter.** Write to someone who has been meaningful in your life and tell them why you are thankful for their contribution and/or call them up and read the letter. A study showed that people who did this felt a significant increase in happiness, meaning, optimism, and life satisfaction for up to 3 months after reading the letter.
- **Write a poem a day.** Create your own 30-day poetry challenge. It helps to focus your mind on one moment, idea, breath, sensation. It creates a rhythm beyond the daily news sound bites and taps us into the rhythms of the seasons and our souls. Encourage

someone you know to do it as well. Schedule a time to read your collection to one another.

- **Read your way through your stack of books and/or magazines.** Indulge yourself in that stack of books or magazines that have been piling up on your coffee table. This activity helps break the boredom, creates a sense of accomplishment. For magazines it can help you to decide whether to continue your magazine subscriptions.
- **Take an on-line yoga class.** Yoga increases body awareness, relieves stress, reduces muscle tension, strain, and inflammation, sharpens attention and concentration, and calms and centers the nervous system.
- **Be gentle with yourself.** If something feels stressful, consider its purpose. Is it necessary or simply expected? If you did not do it, what would be the worst outcome? At the end of each day, ask yourself what felt productive, what felt meaningful, and what contributed to your mental health. Focus on what went well, no matter how small, and build on those successes!
- **Reflect and think about “What I’m Leaving in 2020”.** Write a letter to yourself listing all the accomplishments, lessons, and things you are most grateful for in 2020. This is a wonderful way to give yourself perspective and make the year feel complete. It is also a good time to begin charting how you may or may not do things differently in 2021.
- **Think of well-being as a journey rather than a destination.** This simple shift in concept allows for grace and patience if we find ourselves distracted or having fallen off the path along the way. Well-being as a journey recognizes improvements come gradually and if we **maintain a sense of purpose** and direction, in time, we will reach our desired goal.
- **Well-being is not a “one size fits all” experience.** There can be some variance in what it looks and feels like from one person to the next. Where one lives may impact the frequency in which one can engage in outdoor activities. Genetics can predispose some to physical and emotional conditions and culture can shape the ways in which well-being is defined and practiced. Consider what well-being looks like for you and engage in those things that support your own personal experience of the concept.
- **Give yourself permission to take a tech-break.** For many, 2020 has increased our reliance upon social media and technology. Consider how this surge of dependency impacts your sense of well-being. Are you constantly scanning for missed texts, tweets, and emails throughout the day? Are you spending more time on Zoom and Facebook than you are with the people who share your living space? Evaluate how much time is spent using technology and how this time can be shifted to enhancing your well-being.
- **Clean one space or thing.** This is a win-win. Whether you clean out your refrigerator, scrub the tub, or wash the inside of your car windshield, the reward of a sparkling clean space is always uplifting.
- **Eat Healthy.** Healthy eating means having a healthy attitude toward food. Try new foods, enjoy meals with friends, and plan ahead so you can be sure to include lots of fresh fruits and vegetables
- **Learn a new skill.** Learning a new skill can boost self-confidence and raise self-esteem. If your time is limited, there are many ways to bring learning into your life. Try learning a new recipe, use a YouTube tutorial to take on a DIY project. There are plenty of mobile apps that can help you learn anything from astronomy and chess to video editing and computer coding.

- **Recall Positive Life Events.** Spend time thinking about some of your best memories. Whether it is a vacation, an award you received, or a special time spent with a friend, recalling the happiest times in your life can bring more positivity to your mindset.
- **Practice Forgiveness.** Letting go of past hurt and anger is key to good psychological well-being. Forgiveness is about releasing these emotions that are holding you back and moving into a greater state of well-being.

Picking one or two of the aforementioned tips to do is a start to a better 2021!

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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