

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

from the desk of Dr. Steve Hutton

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

Why do we need to concern ourselves about self-care? You cannot always control the circumstances that life throws your way, but you can control how well you take care of yourself. Right now, we are faced with multiple situations not within our control. There is an unease about re-openings despite rising COVID diagnosis rates, uncertainty about the school year ahead, sadness about missed celebrations, and obliterated routines. These are all factors about why self-care is important. What we are now faced with is a realization that “normal” may no longer exist in our world. We now must get used to the new normal, whatever that may be, and it is very stressful. Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen, author, psychiatrist, speaker once said, “When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life.” If you are a parent of a child with epilepsy, have been diagnosed with epilepsy yourself, or you are a caretaker of someone with epilepsy, your self-care is important. I believe now more than ever given the circumstances of today that we can never put too much emphasis on self-care. As I have said before, we must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others.

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins talks about self-care. He reminds us to think about the safety speech you hear every time you are on a plane. If you are traveling with other people who might need your help in case of an emergency, the flight attendants tell you to be sure to secure your own oxygen mask before tending to those in your care. Why? Because if you try to help others without ensuring your own safety first, you might pass out. The same logic can be applied to your everyday life. When you can care for yourself physically, emotionally, and mentally, you become better able to pursue your goals and enrich the lives of the people around you. Check out Robbins' Self Care site. I found some usable information here—you might too. Whatever tool you choose to use on your path to better self-care, get started. It matters to those you care about and it is never selfish to take care of yourself: it is selfish not to. Noma Nazish reminds me that self-care is neither indulgent nor fancy. Do not feel guilty about it. It is that important. Self-care habits ensures that you stay sharp, motivated and healthy.”

It is so important to make sure you take good care of your body, mind, and soul every day, not just when you get sick. Learning how to eat right, reduce stress, exercise regularly, and take a time-out when you need it are hallmarks of self-care and can help your anti-stress, stay healthy, and be resilient. I have tried to incorporate a few self-care activities in my life that seem to be working. Below are a few things that I had done for my own self-care:

- Get quality sleep by having a regular routine that includes no technology/tv before bed. This is a hard one for me since I have a long history of watching tv before bed. I recently added a wake up stretch while still in bed to help get the blood flowing.

- Eat better foods. I have stopped eating all processed sugars and flours. I have more energy throughout the day.
- Get outside. A thirty to sixty-minute walk is a great self-care activity. I take a walk alone or with some company of the human or animal kind. Walking must become a habit. Otherwise, it does not happen. The loss of a reliable daily routine can be distressing for many
- Find a few minutes alone. As an early riser (somewhere between 4:30 – 5:30) I look forward to watching the sun rise or listening to some soft music. It sets a grateful start to my day.
- Take intermittent breaks (for lunch, calling your mom, or taking a stroll).
- Identify what you are grateful for. There are so many things that we can be grateful for even now. Practicing an attitude of gratitude can often help you get through situations much easier. I also have learned that what matters is not what I thought mattered before. Celebrate the small accomplishments and do not sweat the small stuff. Gone are the busy afternoons and evenings of sports practices and games, or other scheduled activities! Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, we have had the opportunity to talk with and re-connect with our children. I am more connected to each of my kids now than before. They are talking to me about everything. Start and end each day by reflecting on a couple of things for which you are grateful. You can just acknowledge it, journal, draw it out, or do a collage. These days, chicken, paper towels, and toilet paper make my list.
- Reframing is used to help us right-size a situation or see it differently to change our feelings toward it. Many people, for example, feel that they are “stuck at home” now. Could you reframe this as being “tucked safely at home,” to evoke a completely different set of emotions? Reframing can also enhance feelings of gratitude — a quality proven to boost happiness. What you tell yourself about situations matters. Recognize this opportunity to reset and reassess.
- Identify ways to show kindness. To work on this, think about how you can help someone now, despite your own struggles or limitations. That could mean helping an elderly neighbor get groceries. Fortunately, you can even arrange that from the comfort of your home with online ordering!
- Identify things that make you smile and try to make people laugh. It could be remembering funny memories with the family. It could be posting one funny thing on Facebook each day.
- Strengthen your connections with the special folks in your life and take advantage of technologies that allow you to connect. Have get-togethers on FaceTime and Zoom.

As Audre Lorde said, “I have come to believe that caring for myself is not self-indulgent. Caring for myself is an act of survival.” Self-care is really rooted in self-preservation.

Remember, you must take care of yourself before you can take care of everyone else.

As Yung Pueblo, poet, meditator, and speaker, said:

I am not fully healed, I am not fully wise, I am still on my way, what matters is that I am moving forward.

Remember, Carpe Diem – Seize the Day!