

EMOTIONAL FITNESS

Making self-care a priority in your life

I have a little exercise for you to try. Come up with a to-do list of everything that you want to accomplish over the next few days. Stop reading at the end of this paragraph so you can make your list. Once you've completed the exercise, continue reading from here.



**BARTON
GOLDSMITH**

Now, go over your list, and be honest with yourself: Did self-care show up at all among the things you want to accomplish?

Frankly, I just did this exercise, and self-care showed up next to last on my list. My bad.

Most people put life issues, work and family ahead of themselves. But when you start ignoring physical or psychological symptoms, along with missing health appointments and not exercising, and are eating like Guy Fieri, you could be setting yourself up for a difficult future, because eventually that behavior will catch up with you.

Here is an excellent list of self-care actions from the National Institute of Mental Health:

- **Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.

- **Eat healthy, regular meals, and stay hydrated.** A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. It's also good to limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee.

- **Make sleep a priority.** Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue-light exposure from your phone

or computer before bedtime.

- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy such as journaling.

- **Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.

- **Practice gratitude.** Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night, or replay them in your mind.

- **Focus on positivity.** Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.

- **Stay connected.** Reach out to friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help.

Sometimes it's hard to know when to reach out for help, but if you have been experiencing any of these symptoms for two weeks or longer, it's time:

- Difficulty sleeping.
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes.
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable.

If you've ever been on an airplane, you know that if the oxygen masks are released, you need to put on your own mask before you can help anyone around you. Well, the same rule applies to life: Take care of yourself first, and then you can take care of others and other things. Pardon me while I go and rewrite my list.

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