

News Release

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CONTACT: Melissa Whitfield, melissa.whitfield@ttuhsc.edu
(806) 743-1948

Love Yourself First

Self-care isn't selfish; it's essential for a fulfilling life

Prioritizing self-care might seem selfish, especially around Valentine's Day and Lent, the time of year we're reminded to think of others and practice self-sacrifice. But what if the ultimate act of love was to strive to achieve a truly joyful and fulfilling life? When people are at their best, they build healthier and more fulfilling connections with others.

A psychiatrist in the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine explained that by making self-care a priority and embracing self-love, one unlocks a deeper sense of purpose, greater reliance and the capacity to truly connect with others. It is the ultimate gift for oneself and those around.

"There are several kinds of self-care which are important to maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life," Poorvanshi Alag, M.D., assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry, said. "There is physical self-care, which includes nutrition, sleep and exercise, mental self-care, emotional or spiritual self-care and social self-care."

Self-care is a holistic concept. It is a conscious and deliberate effort to take care of one's own well-being. What might work for one person might not work for someone else. For example, some might practice meditation for mental self-care; others might go for a nature walk or do yoga.

"Self-care helps in mental clarity and focus and in the reduction of stress and anxiety," Alag said. "For the ones who practice self-care consistently, it provides them with long-term benefits, including mental and emotional health. One thing, which is really important, is that self-care helps strengthen self-esteem and helps build resilience. When people have setbacks or challenges in life, they're able to work on them effectively. So even though people might believe that practicing self-care is selfish, it is really important to prioritize self-care. It helps in maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life."

Practicing self-care can take as little as 10 minutes and be beneficial. Taking a shower is an example of practicing self-care.

To get started, Alag recommended identifying the physical, mental and emotional things which rejuvenate, relax and help reduce stress. The next steps are to create a plan and dedicate a specific time for self-care. That could include setting timers to stay on track.

"You just can't do this randomly," Alag stressed. "Set aside at minimum five to 10 minutes for self-care every day. You need to make sure it's dedicated time. Be mindful because you can be doing it and not

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be present. Self-care means being self-aware, compassionate about it and being present 100% on what you're doing.”

To stay on track, be sure to note your self-care as you progress. Accountability partners and a positive support system of people who also practice self-care is helpful. Setting realistic goals helps as well.

“Setting unrealistic goals and expecting them to be fulfilled leads to failure which is going to be more stressful,” Alag said. “Always remember to reflect on the benefits. If you talk about the positives and how it's helping you, you're more likely to stay on track.”

Finally, make sure to celebrate those achievements, added Alag.

“Even if it's small, make sure you do because the more you celebrate those small achievements, the more you'll want to be a part of doing things which involve self-care.”

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