

Making you matter

Looking after yourself not only makes you healthier and happier, it enables you to better nurture the people around you.

Do you often limp towards the end of the week looking forward to some rest and relaxation, only to groan when the alarm goes off Monday morning because you had such a busy weekend? Maybe you were running the kids around, doing overtime, or catching up on domestic chores. In our busy world, many of us often juggle so many responsibilities that we put ourselves at the bottom of the priority list. When did you last take some time for yourself or do something just for you? If you can't remember or feel like it would be impossible to put yourself first, it could be time to make some changes in your life to help you take better care of yourself and the people around you.

“When we look after our physical health by exercising, and nurture our emotional health through taking time out, we have more energy and reduce stress,” says Melbourne based psychologist, Meredith Fuller. This balance flows on to our work environment, where we perform better; our home life, where we are more patient and caring; and our social life, where we have more time and focus.

“In short, ensuring that you are happy and healthy helps you be the best person you can possibly be, which boosts your self-esteem and improves your life,” adds Fuller.

Enjoy guilt-free “me” time

To varying degrees men and women suffer from the ‘burned chop’ syndrome – where we think of other people’s needs and put them ahead of our own. But is this the best way to nurture those around us? “I always point out that if you don’t take time out for yourself, the people around you suffer,” says Dr Timothy Sharp, author of the Happiness Handbook (Finch Publishing, \$24.95 RRP) and founder of the Happiness Institute in Sydney,

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which teaches techniques in positive psychology. “It’s important to let go of the idea that ‘me’ time is selfish. Educate the people around you about the benefits of your time out and remind yourself why it matters as well. If you’re not looking after yourself, you can’t possibly look after anyone else because you become so depleted you have little left to give.”

Me-time booster: Make an appointment with yourself for one hour every week to do something you enjoy. Meditate, contemplate, go for a walk, listen to music, paint, write in a journal, soak in a warm bath or phone an old

friend for a long chat. If possible, also set aside 10 minutes in every day to do something for yourself. Enjoy!

Make short breaks count

Try not to be too black and white about life. Many of us slip into this trap — we don’t get a day or a week off, so mistakenly we think there’s no point trying to fit in any down time. But why not try to enjoy the special things in bite-sized pieces? “I had a client who had given up golf because he couldn’t

fit in four hours to play,” says Dr Sharp. “We worked out that he could go to a driving range for half an hour and hit a few balls, which he did and was very happy because he could still make time to pursue his passion.”

Me-time booster: Take small breaks of quality me time throughout the day. Savour your morning cuppa in the sun, listen to music while you cook dinner, stop for a moment to notice how beautiful the spider’s web looks.

For more information, visit The Happiness Institute:
www.thehappinessinstitute.com

Stop, revive, feel alive

To help look after yourself, you need to plan ahead and also seize the moment. Here are some simple tips:

- Play a favourite CD in the car and sing along — music makes the body release natural painkillers called endorphins.
- Lie down and relax every muscle group from head to toe.
- Enjoy a massage over your lunch break to rejuvenate.
- Get up half an hour earlier to enjoy an aromatherapy bath before work.
- Lie down on a picnic blanket and watch the clouds roll by.
- Swap houses with your parents for the weekend so that you can have a proper break from the kids.

Time savers

Try these tips to help free up more time for yourself.

- Where possible, delegate to your partner, colleagues and kids.
- Do the food shopping outside peak hours so you don’t waste time in queues. Organise a buddy system with a friend - you buy her groceries one fortnight and she gets yours the next.
- Ring ahead to check if the doctor is running to time.
- Write a weekly menu so that you don’t waste time buying last-minute ingredients.
- Put bills or kids’ school notes in the same place so you can find them quickly.