

## Self-Care is NOT Selfish

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Most of us have heard the reminder from flight attendants before takeoff: in the event of an emergency, put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others. Just like our instructions before a flight, in our day to day lives, we need to take care of ourselves before we take care of the people we love.

Let's start by removing the most common barrier to self-care: the belief that we are selfish when we take care of ourselves. Self-care is not selfish; it's an approach to living that helps you refresh, replenish your personal motivation, and grow as a person. Self-care can include exercise, eating healthy, getting proper rest, having a good support system, and taking time to relax.

### Why is self-care so important?

Oftentimes, when we are busy, the first and easiest thing to eliminate from our schedules is self-care. In reality, we actually need to be more mindful about implementing self-care habits.

Life is full of stressors, and if we do not possess and practice healthy coping skills or consistent self-care technique, we run the risk of burn-out, depression, loneliness, and physical ailments.

### What is your oxygen mask?

Everyone's oxygen mask is unique, and it's important to spend time figuring out what our mask is, then making a habit of wearing it!

Here are some examples to help you start building or strengthening your mask:

#### Physical

- Eat a healthy diet
- Get enough sleep
- Go to the gym
- Take a bubble bath
- Turn off your cell phone

#### Psychological

- Attend therapy
- Draw
- Journal
- Practice asking for and receiving help
- Spend time in self-reflection
- Think about your positive qualities

#### Emotional

- Cuddle with your pet
- Laugh
- Practice forgiveness
- Practice self-compassion
- Try a new hobby
- Watch a funny movie

#### Personal

- Get coffee with a friend
- Go on a date
- Learn more about yourself
- Plan short- and long-term goals
- Spend time with your family

Self-care can be the most valuable gift you can give yourself and the people who depend on you. Be sure to make time to care for yourself throughout your day.



## Attitude and Longevity: Do Thoughts and Emotions Impact Health?

There are plenty of tools available today that can help us learn a great deal about our health, and some can even begin to give us a sense of our own longevity.

Is asking yourself, “How healthy do I feel?” an effective way to gauge longevity? According to Duke University researchers, the answer is yes. In one study, 3,000 heart patients were asked to classify their health as poor, fair, good, or very good. Those who chose “very good” lived the longest. Not surprising results; those who described their health as “poor” probably had good reasons. However, when researchers adjusted for age, smoking, activity level, weight, blood pressure, and other data points, they found that a person’s opinion of their health still held up as a key to longevity.

In a study of more than 5,000 people over the age of 65, Johns Hopkins University researchers found that those who have a poor image of their health were nearly twice as likely to die within five years. The study indicated that having a pessimistic outlook on health can even be deadlier than congestive heart failure or smoking fifty or more packs of cigarettes each year.

Increasing bodies of research support the importance of a positive outlook. Depression and anxiety can fuel many illnesses, including heart disease, hypertension, asthma, and possibly even cancer or diabetes.

### Negativity and Physical Health

It has been well-documented that chronic stress, negative attitudes, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can upset the body’s hormone balance and deplete the brain chemicals necessary for happiness. Chronic stress has been shown to decrease our lifespan by shortening our telomeres—the “end caps” of our DNA strands.

Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, states that positive emotions have two key effects: they broaden our perspective of the world, inspiring creativity and wonder; and they build up over time, giving us a necessary margin for emotional resiliency.

According to Dr. Fredrickson, the benefits of positivity include faster recovery from cardiovascular stress, better sleep, fewer colds, and a greater sense of well-being.

Some of us, however, have a “negativity bias,” and can spend too much time ruminating over experiences like bad traffic or disagreements with others, causing us to stay stuck in negative thoughts. According to Dr. Fredrickson, we need to experience three positive emotions for every negative one to offset a negativity bias.

In order for us to flourish and build up our psychological resources, we need to practice these positive emotions:

**Forgiveness** – Having an attitude of forgiveness – relinquishing negative feelings around an event – can be learned and can contribute to better immune function, longer lifespan, and lower blood pressure.

**Gratitude** – Focusing on the positive aspects of life and giving thanks can make a huge impact on emotional well-being. In one study, people who were asked to count their blessings felt happier, exercised more, had fewer physical complaints, and slept better.

**Emotional Resilience** – Resilience is like a rubber band that can help us bounce back after being stretched and pulled by negative emotions. Resilient people can experience pain, sorrow, frustration, and even grief, without falling apart.

Take time every day to check your attitude and practice positive emotional states. Chances are very good that you will live to enjoy them!

