

Holistic OT and Self-Care

Following these self-care practices will enrich your life and make you a more effective practitioner

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As a holistic occupational therapist, I am driven to facilitate change in the lives of my clients, patients, and students. I am also empowered to be the best person I can be through the power of intention.

This article on self-care has been the most difficult article to write for me. I am not a procrastinator; however, this article stumped me because I haven't carved out enough time in my life to allow myself to experience the self-care I deserve.

Whatever I recommend to those I treat is everything that I've experienced first-hand. I have moments in which I have carried over my self-prescribed self-care 100% of the time, but lately my excitement and joy in helping others see value in their own self-care has created an imbalance to enrich my own life.

Through my yoga and Ayurveda training and working closely with master teachers, I have learned the most amazing self-care tools. You can certainly read them in books, journals, or texts, but if "practiced" regularly, life balance will create longevity.

What is Holistic Self-Care?

The World Health Organization defines self-care as "activities individuals, families, and communities undertake with the intention of enhancing health, preventing disease, limiting illness, and restoring health. These activities are derived from knowledge and skills from the pool of both professional and lay experience. They are undertaken by lay people on their own behalf, either separately or in participative collaboration with professionals."¹

Self-care is also defined by the American Holistic Nurses Association: "Focusing on care of self and self-healing [is] essential to caring for others. Self-care comprises those activities performed independently by an individual to promote and maintain personal well-being throughout life."

Through my own eyes as a holistic occupational therapist, holistic self-care is viewed as providing myself time and space to breathe and practice, contemplate and practice, breathe again and practice, and then integrate all the holistic approaches that I've utilized throughout the years.

Holistic Approaches for Yourself

Self-care address the body, mind, and spirit through practices that nurture and attend to these three realms. Self-assessment is a regular practice that has provided my body with signals to address my "self" for harmony. I've listed a few below that you may have already been engaging in, or may be interested in including in your daily life practice.

Body: exercise, grooming, massages, breathing, yoga asana, conscious eating, energy therapies, bodywork, etc.

Mind: quiet contemplation, meditation, mantra, psychotherapy, being in the moment, healing music, laughter, instilling boundaries with others, surrounding yourself with like-minded people, being worldly, etc.

Spirit: meditation and prayer, Satsang (dialoguing with like-minded people), reading spiritual literature, listing positive things in your life, random acts of kindness, etc.

Holistic Home Program

I invite you to take this time to contemplate and discern what self-care looks like for you on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. The physical realm of our being is all of the physical aspects of life that come and go, and is usually consumed by external reality. We train this aspect of ourselves, take care of it, and nurture it, so that we can enjoy our external lives despite the chaos in the world.

The emotional realm of our being is the connections we have to our higher "self." Emotions are a vital part of our inner guidance and we must pay attention to them. Most of our emotions are linked back to our conditioned family systems, traumas, and belief systems from what we heard, were taught, or read. The emotional realm is linked to our thoughts, which are connected to our body's inner wisdom.

The spiritual realm exists next to the physical realm, and we cannot perceive it by the naked eye. The physical and spiritual realms interact in ways that we cannot see or fully understand. This realm for me is connecting "inwardly."

Connectedness is the key component to the spiritual realm of knowing and feeling connected to the same energies that surround us. By understanding each realm we can then establish a home program to nurture ourselves for self-development.

We are so often used to developing home programs for our clients and their caregivers. What would it look like if we took time each day to follow an enriched self-care practice? It can be as simple as being aware of these qualities in ourselves:

1. Letting go. When we can let go of the daily plans we have for ourselves, the true plan unfolds. It is important to have structure throughout the day (i.e. going to work), but when something doesn't go as planned or throws us off, we must go with it, because whatever is meant to happen, will happen. Read *The Sacred Contract* by Carolyn Myss if you would like to learn more.
2. Strength. Confidence, practice, open-mindedness, and determination are attributes that will allow us to achieve almost anything. Mind over matter.

3. Relaxation. Just as if we were lying in Savasana (corpse pose), relaxation is a skill to be learned as it is beneficial to the mind-body connection.
4. Listening to our bodies. Learning to connect to our "inner wisdom" by feeling, listening, then responding is a way of being in the world we call "life." We have to be open to ask for guidance and be open to receiving it. Seeing the patterns, how all the parts connect, is a way of looking at life.
5. Treat ourselves with kindness. By practicing loving kindness we become open-minded and bring self-awareness to all areas of our life at any given time.
6. Learning from mistakes rather than being a perfectionist. Mistakes are the greatest gifts, as we can try things out over and over again until we learn from them. Then, we can move on to learn some more.
7. Just practice. Yoga on and off the mat through asana, journaling, meditation, guided imagery, Satsang, chanting, exercising, etc. are all ways to connect.
8. Avoiding negative environments or toxic people. The people we spend time with throughout the years will change, depending on where we are at any given time. People come into our lives for a reason. Some stay with us for a lifetime; others will come and go. Surrounding yourself with like-minded people allows you to truly know yourself at a faster rate.
9. Conscious communication. Your soul, your mind, and yourself make up your identity. Communication is vibration. It keeps us real; it allows us to check things out for clarity. It can make us feel comfortable in the world we live in.
10. Be playful. Life taken too seriously is a life just "waiting" to unfold. Don't wait! Take action now and watch yourself turn into a kid again.

Reference

1. World Health Organization (1983). Health Education in Self-Care: Possibilities and Limitations.

Resource

<http://www.ahna.org/Membership/Member-Advantage/Self-care>

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