

The Luxury of Self-Care

Honor and protect your greatest resource: You.

By Gail Sussman Miller

What do you think of when you hear the word luxury? It might be a treat, like a luscious chocolate, or an indulgence in a frivolous experience.

But how many women do you know who treat self-care as a luxury? In the name of conquering our endless To Do lists, women tend to sacrifice their own needs. We put our jobs, businesses, families, friends and even strangers' needs ahead of our own.

In today's historic and uncertain economical climate, many of us are scaling back on resources and going without. More than ever, now is the time to use self-care to honor and protect your greatest resource: you. This is not a luxury. Rather, it's a necessity to help you better handle today's challenges. It's like changing the oil in your car or putting gas in your tank. How energy-efficient is your "vehicle?"

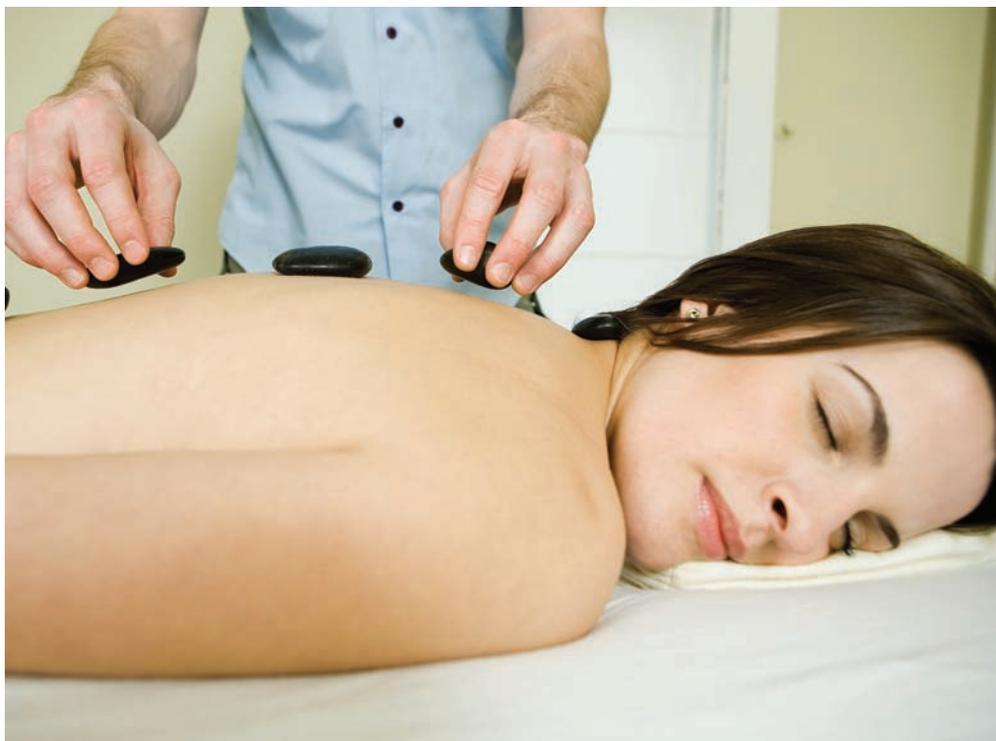
Let's define self-care as an investment in the maintenance and renewal of your body, mind and spirit. All three elements of your existence are more interrelated and vital than you may realize. Balancing these energy sources is far more effective than chasing that ever-elusive work/life balance.

Mary Bahr, president and creative director at MAB Advertising Inc., discovered that "the goal of balance creates even more pressure and stress." Today, balance to Mary is "when I can spend time doing the things that make me happy, drive the business forward and give back to the community all at the same time."

The key, Mary says, was learning to stop worrying about how others were judging her or if she was doing "it" right. "This results in fear-driven action and pushing ourselves to please others," Mary says. "Rebalance your wheels by increasing attention to the care of your body and spirit while you book some 'mind vacations.'"

Annie Rosenthal, a private practice clinical social worker and psychotherapist, found that neglecting one aspect of her life led to increasingly negative outcomes. "[While] I still push back doctor appointments, lose sleep working too late inside and outside the home, and have not been to the gym consistently since my daughter was born, the thing I do religiously is my Saturday morning yoga class," Annie says. "Before [this class] I felt stressed, tense and like I never got a break."

Annie keeps this commitment by paying for the class in advance and going with a girlfriend. "What made this a hard habit to take on," Annie says, "was feeling guilty that it would burden my husband [to watch the baby], even though rationally I know I'm a better mother and wife by doing it."



Mary Bahr learned a similar lesson about taking care of her body. "When I ignore exercise, I break down...literally," she says. "Early this year, I felt that I just didn't have time to exercise regularly. What happened? I injured my back while my family was out of town and was literally helpless on my bedroom floor for hours. Talk about a sign! I listened."

Despite her harried career, Mary has learned to take time for herself. "I'm in the deadline-driven, insane advertising business," Mary says. "As president of the company, I now understand I'm allowed to say 'no' or 'not now.' I've committed to a regular training regimen, which means getting up early, sometimes ditching other meetings."

Sheree Franklin, an intuitive coach and counselor at Holistic Health Practice, focuses on her spiritual health by meditating and praying each morning for 20 minutes. "When my day is too rushed and I don't have time for my spiritual practice," Sheree says, "it feels like things don't fall into place as smoothly and there's greater tendency to miss something that needs to be done. This practice allows me to get more done in less time as I center myself and consciously set the intent for my day."

Thanks to these habits, Sherry has found she's more creative and often taps into her intuition for answers instead of asking friends for advice. "I made this a new habit by not allowing other things to get in the way," she says. "I take the phone off the hook and make sure my cell phone is off." She also keeps her meditation area clutter-free.

Now it's your turn. For the next 30 days, invest in just one new self-care habit. Luxuriate in self-care, self-attention and the self-love you deserve. Be vigilant. Make a vow to yourself and perhaps to someone who'll hold you accountable. Your body, mind and spirit will thank you with exponentially greater results than the effort involved.

The good news is many self-care practices are no- or low-cost. Expect to improve personal and business relationships, make more inspired decisions, find creative, more efficient solutions and accept, even welcome, change. In short, self-care affects your bottom-line: a happy, fulfilled, well-lived life. ■

Gail Sussman Miller inspires selfcare at www.inspiredchoice.com.