

How Clinicians Practice Self-Care & 9 Tips for Readers

Self-care is vital for well-being, and no group knows that better than clinicians. Not only do they help clients learn to take better care of themselves, but they also need to make self-care a priority — especially given the emotional strains inherent in their profession.

“As a psychotherapist I know that I have a limit on how much suffering and sadness I can hold and my after-work time needs to provide pleasant, soothing, joyful energy to replenish myself from being empathic with my patients’ struggles,” said [Roseann Adams](#), LCSW, a psychotherapist with an independent practice in Chicago.

[Stephanie Sarkis](#), Ph.D, a psychotherapist and author of *10 Simple Solutions to Adult ADD: How to Overcome Chronic Distraction & Accomplish Your Goals*, views self-care as preventative — as her defense against burnout.

[Ari Tuckman](#), PsyD, a clinical psychologist and author of *Understand Your Brain, Get More Done: The ADHD Executive Functions Workbook*, believes that knowing yourself is key to preventing burnout. He underscored the importance of spotting the early signs of overwhelm.

[John Duffy](#), Ph.D, a clinical psychologist and author of the book *The Available Parent: Radical Optimism for Raising Teens and Tweens*, defined self-care as “attending to your own needs such that you are content, focused, motivated, and ‘on your game.’”

Many people feel guilty about making time for themselves. But when you’re stressed and exhausted, you have less energy to give to others. According to [Kim Boivin](#), MEd, a registered clinical counselor at [Positive Change Counseling Services](#) in Vancouver, BC, Canada, “We are interdependent so what I do to take care of myself has an impact on all who I interact with. When I care for myself, I care for others better too.”

As [Terri Orbuch](#), Ph.D, psychotherapist and author of *Finding Love Again: Six Simple Steps to a New and Happy Relationship*, said, “Everyone needs to make sure they take care of themselves; they need to make their own well-being and happiness a priority in their life. If you don’t, who will?”

How Clinicians Practice Self-Care

Self-care is a top priority for Sarkis, who practices an assortment of activities — from working out to spending time with loved ones.

I exercise daily, I practice healthy eating, I socialize, I spend time with my loved ones, I engage in activities I enjoy, I take time out for myself, and I say no to things that are not meeting my needs. I also think humor is a very important part of life. Having an optimistic outlook also is an important part of self-care.

Boivin’s self-care routine also consists of various activities, such as meditating, seeing a therapist and savoring a sweet treat.

My regular self-care behavior also includes mindfulness meditation (on my own and with a group); yoga at least twice a week; personal therapy; professional supervision; consultation with colleagues; going on retreats/holidays; making healthy meals and bringing them to work; laughing; going for walks

around the block, looking for beauty to connect with, and breathing deeply. Oh, and eating dark chocolate with a cup of hot tea and only doing that. No multitasking, just enjoying that.

Orbuch schedules enjoyable activities ahead of time, including a massage session every six months and a weekly appointment with a trainer. If she doesn't, she works right through her self-care time. And exercise serves as a major stress reliever.

I try to practice self-care on a daily basis by exercising [such as] bik[ing], [lifting] weights [and] walking...Some days it might be 30 minutes, and other days it might be 60 to 75 minutes. For me, it can be any type of exercise as long as it is something. Exercise allows me to relax, focus on me and just think.

She also sets realistic expectations for her accomplishments. "I try to feel good about what I do accomplish every day, instead of expecting more or looking to what I haven't done. I do not take disappointments personally."

Tuckman often works late but he's adamant about protecting his sleep. "Sleep deprivation really kills me, so I try really hard to honor my bedtime, even though it means stopping something fun," he said.

He's the same way about exercise and rarely misses a workout. "I block out in my schedule to work out three times a week, as well as hopefully getting a bike ride or two in on the weekends," he said. "Working out and listening to music on my iPod fires me back up for the rest of the day."

Duffy described his self-care routine as a work-in-progress. But he tries his best to make time for the activities that are important to him, including being with his family, writing, reading and playing and listening to music.

For Adams, self-care includes everything from regularly scheduling medical appointments to hiring help to taking in the arts to seeing new places to avoiding stress-inducing people and experiences.

Psychotherapist and author [Jeffrey Sumber](#) limits the number of client hours he schedules each week. He views self-care as "the line between giving and taking as a healer." At some point, giving to others becomes depleting, which diminishes a therapist's effectiveness.

How You Can Practice Self-Care

Clinicians also shared their suggestions on how readers can incorporate self-care into their busy routines.

1. Identify what activities help you feel your best. Self-care is individual. As Duffy said, "Self-care for one person will mean something completely different for someone else. One person may need more alone time, for example, while another may nurture herself by spending more time out with friends."

2. Put it on your calendar — in ink! Take a close look at your calendar and carve out one or two hours for self-care and stick to it, Boivin said. This may take extra prep, but it's worth it. For Adams, the mornings are the best time to exercise, so at night, she lays out her workout and professional gear and anything else she needs for her day.

Keep an eye out for special events, too. "When I see information about a cultural event that I would enjoy, I make a reservation or purchase tickets so that I have something pleasurable on my calendar," Adams said.

If you're crunched for time, Orbuch suggested gradually increasing your self-care each month by a few minutes.

3. Sneak in self-care where you can. If you don't have huge chunks of time, you can still fit in little moments of relaxation. As Boivin said, don't wait to add self-care to your life until your schedule frees up. (You might be waiting a

while to forever.) She suggested starting where you are. “Starting is the most important step to take.”

“Even if you take just five minutes to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, it can help your stress level,” Sarkis said. A 10-minute walk makes a big difference to Boivin.

Don’t hesitate to get creative either. Boivin uses her time between client appointments to listen to music and dance. Once a client arrived early and heard the music. Boivin shared her self-care tip and the client loved the idea.

4. Take care of yourself physically. According to Orbuch, this means getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods and exercising. “When you physically take care of yourself, you will reap the benefits emotionally, psychologically, health-wise, and in your relationships,” she said.

5. Know when to say no. “Your health and well-being come first,” said Sarkis, who suggested nixing anything that doesn’t feel fulfilling. If you have a hard time saying no, here are [some tips](#) along with advice for [building and preserving better boundaries](#).

6. Check in with yourself regularly. Duffy suggested asking yourself the following critical questions: “Are you working too much? Do you feel tapped out? What do you need to take away, and what would you like to add?”

7. Surround yourself with great people. Make sure that the people in your life are “upbeat, positive and know how to enjoy life,” Orbuch said.

8. Consider the quality of self-care. “Go for quality, especially when the quantity is lacking,” Tuckman said. For instance, rather than getting sucked into channel surfing for hours, Tuckman only watches the shows he’s recorded. “By minimizing my TV time, I have more time for other better things.”

9. Remember that self-care is non-negotiable. “In order to live a healthy and rewarding life, self-care is a necessity. With that attitude, it becomes very natural and easy to do,” Boivin said.

Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S. is an Associate Editor at Psych Central and blogs regularly about eating and self-image issues on her own blog, [Weightless](#).

APA Reference

Tartakovsky, M. (2012). How Clinicians Practice Self-Care & 9 Tips for Readers. *Psych Central*. Retrieved on February 7, 2015, from <http://psychcentral.com/lib/how-clinicians-practice-self-care-9-tips-for-readers/00011200>

*Last reviewed: By John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on 30 Jan 2013
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Site last updated: 7 Feb 2015