

# Self-care

## during COVID-19

Taking the time to connect with yourself and what you really need will ensure you get through the hard times, writes **ANGELA HEISE**.



**W**hen Socrates spoke about “care of the self” more than 2,500 years ago, his definition of self-care was one of “care for the soul”, the search for self-knowledge, and the understanding of ourselves beyond body, status, wealth, and reputation. As he explained: “Once we know ourselves, we may learn how to care for ourselves, but otherwise we never shall.”

Our modern definition of self-care is very different. It relates to the deliberate maintenance of mental, physical and emotional health, especially in the context of handling stress. This has come into even sharper focus in the current coronavirus crisis where we are learning to be more deliberate in how we manage ourselves. Taking hand sanitisers, masks and physical distancing aside, we have become aware of structures that only in their absence show us how much we have been taking them for granted. These are constructs that go beyond those providing economic stability. They support us as social human beings and help us maintain mental and emotional health. Eating out in a restaurant, attending a concert, playing a group sport or working out at the gym ... these aren't merely self-care activities; they connect us with others and give our lives meaning.

So what would happen if you went back to Socrates' definition of self-care

in times of COVID-19? What if knowing yourself and nourishing your spirit to get to know who you really are became the goal? You don't need to completely dismantle your life. You could simply use the interruptions to a previously automated life as an opportunity to look at how you can support yourself in living an authentic, fulfilling life. Which, as studies have shown, supports mental health.

Here are some practical suggestions beyond eat well, drink lots of water and get quality sleep:

- Outside of COVID restrictions, we maintain so-called weak social ties. These consist of the everyday encounters with people we have superficial relationships with. While these connections may never go beyond small talk, they provide essential social support. Make a point to say hello to people you encounter. Check in with your neighbours. And, of course, consciously connect with people you love.
- Seemingly everyone has an explanation as to why we are in the current situation and how political, social and economic structures aren't working. Stay away from dramatising media. Contribute to a constructive discussion about evolving opportunities. You will find that you build resilience when you consider opportunities rather than focus on gloom and doom.
- Feel your emotions. Rather than dis-

count or suppress them, make use of them. They show you when something is or isn't working. A so-called 'negative' emotion always has a positive intent. Find out what it is and take constructive action.

- And, yes, meditate. You don't need to sit for hours pretzeled in the lotus position. A few minutes of breathing deeply, becoming present with yourself and mindful of what is going on for you at that moment will do wonders for reconnecting with yourself. It will take you off automatic. While it can be uncomfortable to notice what you may want to ignore, when you learn to observe rather than judge your thoughts, you will reduce stress, make better choices and support self-esteem.

You know what works for you and your mental and emotional health. If you aren't sure, isn't this the perfect time to find out? As always, please ask for help. If there is one thing we are learning at the moment, it is that connection matters – and how important it is to connect from the soul. **LSJ**



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