

SIMPLE STEPS for SELF HEALING

By Pamela Miles

Self care is an act of wisdom and strength. As we support our continued well-being, we strengthen our reserves so that we can meet life as it unfolds. Whatever happens or doesn't happen in the future, it is a priority now to attend to our immediate needs and lay the foundation for long term well-being.

The following is a compendium of self care interventions organized broadly under six categories— sleep, anxiety, immunity, digestion, spirituality, and daily life. These are not discrete compartments, but rather different perspectives on the functioning of the whole being, and many suggestions overlap. A wide variety of interventions has been offered with the hopes that people of varying temperaments, lifestyles, and resources will all find suggestions that appeal to them. As you read, mark one or two suggestions in each category that seem doable. Then choose which one or two you will implement today. Highlight two more that you will incorporate in the next few days. Be reasonable. Taking care of ourselves shouldn't be a stressful pre-occupation. No one has to do everything, but we all need to do something. Most of us would do well to give our immunity priority now. This information is intended for educational purposes only and does not replace the care of a qualified professional.

Lewis Mehl-Madrona, M.D., Ph.D., encourages us not to pathologize the natural course of healing. He says, "A diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is premature in the immediate aftermath of trauma. Whatever you're feeling--anxiety, irritability, emotional sensitivity, or even nothing—these are all normal responses and part of the natural course of healing." Make space in your life for the necessary process of healing to occur. Rather than jumping into hyper-activity to escape feeling emotions, support your healing by simplifying life for a while. Of course, acting on the many simple opportunities we have each day to offer kindness to one another is also deeply healing. If intense feelings or reactions do not soften over time, it may be wise to consult a professional skilled in trauma recovery.

SLEEP

Good sleep greatly supports healing. If you are having difficulty sleeping, here are some suggestions:

- Reduce the amount of TV you are watching, especially the news and especially at night. Limit yourself to just what is necessary to stay informed.
- Take a warm bath scented with lavender essential oil. If you're feeling creative, add bergamot and/or ylang ylang to lift your spirits, and sandalwood or vetiver for stability. A bath that makes you sweat may be therapeutic if you've gotten a chill

or are congested, but for relaxation, keep the temperature below the moist brow threshold. Excessively hot baths can be destabilizing to the system.

- Diffuse lavender oil in the bedroom, or put a drop on your pillow (pure essential oil evaporates and will not stain).
- Practice restorative hatha yoga. Lying on your back with arms comfortably overhead, sit bones at the wall, and legs supported up the wall can bring deep relaxation and rejuvenation. Breathe comfortably and feel your belly let go.
- Eat less in the evening, and don't eat late at night.
- Try a cup of chamomile tea or hot milk with nutmeg 30 minutes before bed.
- Take a few minutes for meditation, conscious breathing, Reiki, or visualizing the moon mid-evening to coax the system back to normal rhythms.
- Make sure you are getting adequate exercise. Some people find evening exercise interferes with sleep. Try varying your schedule to see if it makes a difference.
- Keep paper and pen by your bed and jot down your dreams. Contemplate them in the morning to deepen the emotional release.

ANXIETY

Rescue Remedy is a totally safe trauma support for adults or children. It is inexpensive, readily available and can be taken as often as needed—a few drops either directly under the tongue or in water, 4 times a day or as needed.

Take moments throughout the day to pay attention to the breath. Even one conscious breath can break the stress cycle and bring us back to center. Slight pressure on the space between the eyebrows is very soothing and can be done anywhere. Lean forward at your desk and rest the brow on your hands. When reclining on your side, tip your forehead forward and rest it on the heel of the hand. Gently close the eyes and breathe.

Simple yoga postures can help ease the mind. Saraswati Clere, Anusara yoga instructor and director of Yoga Mandali NYC, suggests spending a few minutes in a comfortable, supported forward bend. To rest in child's pose, sit on the heels with knees apart. Lean forward and support the torso on blankets or cushions between the thighs. At work, push the chair away from the desk, rest the hands and wrist on the desktop, and allow the chest to come comfortably towards the floor. Be gentle and mindful with the body, never forcing.

Herbs can also ease anxiety. Hyland's Calms Forte is a gentle herbal formula for day or evening use by adults or children. Banyan Botanicals (banyanbotanicals.com or 888.829.5722) offers several formulas to improve mental functioning and nourish the nervous system. Inquire about Mental Clarity, Tranquil Mind, and Stress Ease to see if they target your complaints. Many find kava relaxing. It is available in capsule or tincture form at your health food store. When purchasing herbal products, it is important to get a good brand, even if it costs more. Herbs need to be handled properly to maintain their potency. HerbPharm, Gaia, or Herbalists and Alchemists (800.611.8235) offer high quality products. Consult your practitioner if you are already on prescription medications, or if symptoms persist.

IMMUNITY

When the seasons change, the body is vulnerable. Add the stress of a tragedy and you increase the likelihood of lingering illness. Since we can't expect our bodies to bounce back as quickly under the present circumstances, it clearly makes sense to be proactive and prevent anything from settling in. There are many easy ways to stimulate the immune system. Choose one or two that appeal to you.

Two reliable products that are easy to use are:

- Zand Herbal Insure, available in liquid or caps at your health food store, and
- Banyan Botanicals Immune Support, available by phone 888.829.5722 or at www.banyanbotanicals.com.

Either of these can be used preventively, before symptoms occur, especially if you feel tired.

Should you become symptomatic, Dr. Marcey Shapiro, M.D. and herbalist, advises responding immediately with higher than usual dosage of herbal immune stimulants taken more frequently. Taper to a normal dosage once you feel you're getting back to normal.

Andrew Weil, M.D., offers three suggestions to strengthen the immune system, all of which are safe for children:

- Echinacea tincture can be take 2 droppersful 4 times a day for adults, 1 dropperful for children under 10. Look for HerbPharm Super Echinacea.
- Immune strengthening mushrooms such as Maitake or Reishi in liquid extracts or capsules. Suggested dosages are on the products. (Call Herbalists and Alchemists 800.611.8235 if you don't have a product you trust.)
- 2 capsules of Astragalus twice a day, one capsule for children. You can also buy astragalus in Chinatown (or order from Lin Sisters 212.962.5417) and put a piece in the pot anytime you make soup. Just be sure to remove it before serving, as it's very woody!

If you have any reason to take antibiotics, Dr. Weil advises supporting your system with probiotics. Look for Lactobacillus GG, sold under the brand name Culturelle.

Antioxidants support the body's attempts to normalize. Noni, camu camu, and amalaki are fruits naturally rich in antioxidants. Hawaiian Noni capsules are available through American Nutraceuticals (888.848.2548). South American camu camu capsules are distributed by Whole World Botanicals (www.worldbotanicals.com or 888.757.6026). Banyan Botanicals offers the traditional Ayurvedic rejuvenative jam, Chyavanprash, made from a base of amalaki fruit. American Nutraceuticals also offers a form of vitamin C that, taken in orange or cranberry juice, is readily absorbed into the bloodstream, and very effective, for short term use.

There is much in even routine modern life that stresses the liver, and crisis compounds the damage. Milk thistle is an herb that is a proven liver support, and which has no reported toxicity. Dr. Marcey Shapiro advises that milk thistle in capsules containing 250-350mg of 80% silymarin provides excellent protection for the liver.

DIGESTION

Maintaining good digestion supports strong immunity. According to Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of the subcontinent of India, undigested food creates toxins that contribute to disease. Equal squirts (to taste) of ginger and fennel tinctures in a mug of hot water make a delicious tea that strengthens digestion and is slightly warming, useful to many as the cool weather comes in. If you prefer a product, try Zand Digest Herbal.

Take the time to eat peacefully and chew carefully. Bless your meal, or offer gratitude. Miso, in whatever form appeals to you, is very balancing. A spoonful in a mug of hot water makes an instant, soothing and nourishing broth that you can drink at your desk.

Drink LOTS of water, between meals. If a gallon a day sounds like drowning, commit to 2 quarts. Put water bottles on your desk each morning as a reminder.

SPIRITUALITY

Make a commitment to daily spiritual practice in whatever form appeals to you—prayer, meditation, chanting, expressing gratitude, to name a few possibilities. Staying connected to the purity within your own heart is a prerequisite to world peace.

Meditation can be as simple as sitting with eyes closed and breathing comfortably into the space of the heart. Be open to whatever sensations appear—warmth, pulsations, a sense of expansion, or even emptiness. If emotion comes, breathe into it. Set a silent digital kitchen timer for the amount of time you have. Then sit for meditation until the timer sounds, giving yourself fully to your inner reality. Have the conviction that meditation is whatever happens when we sit to meditate.

If you don't have a spiritual practice, use the momentum of this event to create one. Lewis Mehl-Madrona, M.D., Ph.D., and Native American healing elder, suggests burning a little sage to purify yourself, sitting quietly, saying a prayer and singing a song. To burn sage, simply light the dried leaves (available at health food stores), drop onto a shell or metal pan, and wave the smoke.

Creating a personal altar is a healing endeavor that yields continuing returns. Seeing our altar brings joy and invites us to reconnect with our inner resources. An altar is very personal, and there is no set formula. It should be beautiful and appealing to your heart. If you'd like some guidance to get started, Dr. Mehl-Madrona suggests constructing a simple altar that honors the five elements with a crystal (metal), a flower (water), a candle (fire), and dirt (earth). The sage smoke represents air. You can add icons from your faith, pictures of mentors or ancestors who have nurtured your growth, or the names of those for whom you wish to offer prayers. Offering love and light to those who have died supports their dying process and our healing.

DAILY LIFE

Simplify your life. Give yourself time every day to be quiet and find your inner nourishment. Minimize exposure to crowds as you are able. Stay above ground whenever you can. Take the least congested route to where you need to go.

Attend to the people in your life. We all need community now. Dose yourself regularly and liberally with the presence of friends and family. Offer the person in your face your full attention, whether it's a stranger or the mirror.

Take healing. Make an appointment with your favorite healing practitioner. Give your being the help it needs to release trauma and rebalance. If you have healing skills such as Reiki or reflexology, give yourself regular treatments and share sessions with friends.

Above all, be strong in your heart. Have the conviction of the power of your prayers and your chosen efforts. Only by refusing to succumb to powerlessness, and consistently reaching for the highest in both overt and subtle ways can we move through devastation into transformation.

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You already have the precious mixture that will make you well. Use it. - Rumi