

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sandra Long, REHS, RS

Self-Care: Focusing on You

While there is a variety of topics to select for this column, I would like to focus on you, the individual. This year has been a year of many changes, adjustments, and carrying out duties outside of the routine. With this type of activity comes stress. As we all know, some stress is good and some is, well, not so good or positive and is negative stress. Examples of positive stress are going on a holiday or vacation, learning something new, completing a goal, or buying a house. As we are approaching the holidays that can bring both positive and negative stress, I want to focus on good self-care and how you take care of yourself.

For months I have been on emergency management calls with Dallas County. At the end of each week, the Dallas County judge would thank us of taking care of the public and remind us that we needed to remember to take care of ourselves. He would insist that for the weekend we take a break from our emergency management duties because if we didn't, we wouldn't be able to carry on at our best. He would say, "Do some self-care this weekend."

Let's talk about self-care. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines self-care as the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness during periods of stress.

It sounds easy but is probably the one thing most of us are not really good at doing. Lack of energy and time are the two most common reasons self-care is not practiced. Feelings of selfishness, guilt, and finances also contribute to not practicing self-care. People tend

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to have misperceptions about self-care. It is not typically about treats or pampering oneself, it is not the negative stereotype of putting your needs ahead of others, it is not a list of behaviors, and it is not just about solitary activities.

So, now that you know what self-care is not, what is it? And is it really that important? Stress can affect the way we think, feel, and act toward each other. If we let stress rule our lives, we could become unhappy, have fatigue and poor physical health, and burn out. Self-care means knowing yourself, your limits, what makes you happy, identifying ways to enjoy yourself, finding ways to decompress, practicing gratitude, and eating and sleeping properly. Self-care does not have to be time consuming, exhausting, or expensive. Sometimes it is the quick, simple things that can keep us rejuvenated.

It is important to establish a self-care routine. Schedule some time for yourself.

Then engage in an activity you find enjoyable or try something new. For example, I have two go-to activities, both of which I truly enjoy. One is photography. I enjoy going out walking with my camera and experimenting with settings, light, and composition. I may not be great at it yet but there is continuous improvement and thank goodness for digital where I can delete the blurry shots. My other favorite photo subjects are my granddaughters and I cannot get enough of those pictures. My other stress relief is creating in the kitchen or baking. I will find a recipe for something new or sometimes familiar, and bake cakes or cookies. This summer I made jams and jelly, a skill I learned growing up. It is time spent focusing on something different and time spent creating. The baking is generally portioned into snack size plastic bags and taken to work. I have not had any complaints and received a few compliments.

I challenge you to find your stress relief. That thing, hobby, or interest you have always thought about doing but never thought you had time to do. Let me give you a kick start with some ideas that might fit what you like to do: write, take a nap, do yoga, color, volunteer (a social and community benefit), play with pets or volunteer at a local animal shelter, read, meditate, walk in a park, observe a sunset or sunrise, commune with nature, listen to music or audiobooks, meet a neighbor, cook, learn to paint, learn to play an instrument, go for a drive, learn something new, take a bike ride, learn martial arts, learn to make movies, garden, or find a new hobby. Find something that

gives you energy, opens your mind, and releases stress.

Practicing self-care can have a remarkable difference in your well-being and overall health. It can enhance your self-awareness, promote rest and relaxation, and can potentially lead to new interests. If you are inter-

ested in learning more about self-care or want to do your own research, good starting points are *Psychology Today* and authors such as Dr. Shainna Ali, Dr. Tchiki Davis, and Elizabeth Scott. With the holiday season near, it could be a good time to invest in some self-care.

I appreciate and value your work in environmental health and want you to appreciate yourself. 🐶



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Thank you.

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