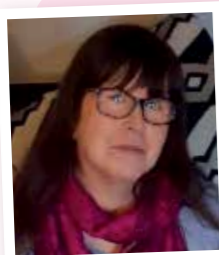
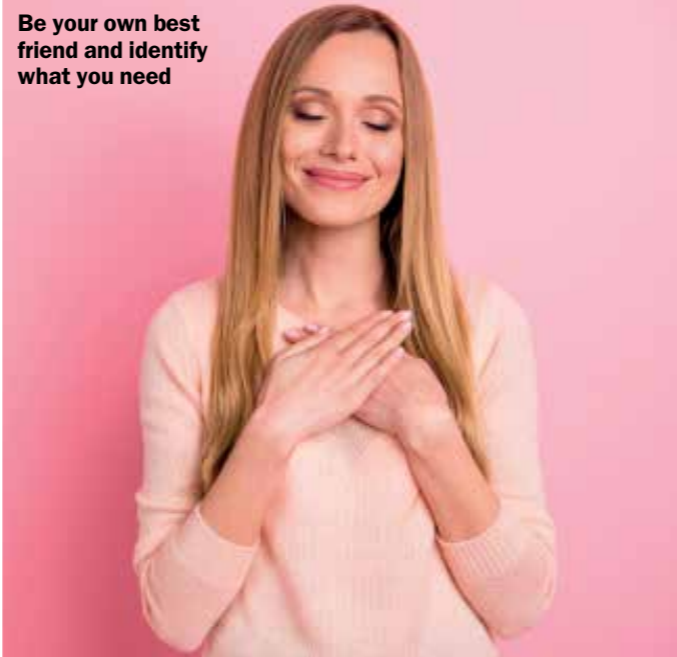


IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

You can't pour from an empty cup! Here's how to find new purpose, be more aware and take proper care of yourself



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Be your own best friend and identify what you need



Turn those negative thoughts around

So here we are in February. It's that time of year when everywhere we look there are hearts and flowers, and everyone is talking about love and relationships. It can be a difficult time for anyone who is not in what society views as a typical perfect relationship. Irrespective of who you are, what type of relationship you are in, or not, as the case may be, the most important relationship you will ever have is the one you have with yourself! In our busy lives we can spend so much time rushing around dealing with family and work responsibilities that we can lose sight of ourselves, who we are and what our own needs really are too.

Maybe you set yourself some New Year resolutions that have already bitten the dust? Did you set them because you wanted to, or because you felt pressurised into making them?

We are sometimes the very ones who put undue pressure on ourselves to be perfect, but have you ever wondered how much better it would be if you just focused instead of just being you and enjoying doing things just for you? Simple things that make you feel better and therefore, often more able to face and cope with all of life's many ups and downs?

It really all starts with you making the decision to take better care of yourself and deciding what you can do to change your current situation and be the best version of you. Why? Because you deserve it, that's why!

You should never feel guilty of taking some time out to administer a little bit of self-care and nurturing, as when you do, you will feel more content and feel more in balance. When you feel more fulfilled, then not only will you benefit, but also all the people you have around you will too. It's like the ripple effect that happens when you drop a pebble into water. Your feelgood vibes can also rub off on others!

When we speak of taking care of ourselves, we need to look at various levels of self-care including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. So where do we begin?

Let us look at some ways you can turn that focus back to you and some simple practices you can introduce into your life on a daily basis to help you be all you want to be!

Affirmations

We can use affirmations to help us focus and change our mindset around things. Sometimes by seeing a word, sentences or positive images it can help to shift or redirect our thoughts. When we work with affirmations we always do it in the present tense and use positive words. So instead of words like can't, don't, haven't, we would use I can, I do, I have. We also focus on the present so we would say for example, I am healthy, not I will be healthy or I want to be healthy.

Once you have decided what affirmation you want to use, you can also choose an image that supports it. A great thing to do is to use sticky notes. Write your affirmations and put them in different places around your home or office. Attaching them to computer screens, mirrors etc where you are going to see them and read them regularly, helps to keep them in the forefront of your mind.

Here are some simple affirmations. They don't need to be longwinded or complicated. In fact, the shorter the better as they are easier to remember!

I am calm. I can do it. I am enough. I am happy. I am healthy. I am positive. I have all I need.



Write reminders of your affirmations

Positive Self Talk

A good starting point is taking the time to look at how you actually talk to yourself! When things go wrong some people will focus on it and go over and over it in their heads. Does that sound familiar? Positive self talk helps us to take something negative and try to turn it into something positive. It links into our subconscious thoughts. By focusing on positive self-talk it helps us to look at things from a more hopeful and optimistic angle. Think of the glass half-full, rather than half-empty, analogy.

Positive self talk can not only improve your motivation and wellbeing, it can help physical health, reduce stress and anxiety and enhance your ability to cope with problems. It will also enhance self-love. Here are a few examples:

I've never tried that before and I'll probably do it wrongly. Let's change that to: *I'm excited to try something new and learn as I do it!*

I'm overweight, I'll never manage to lose it. Let's change that to: *I have the ability and am healthier and fitter.*

I upset that person and they'll never speak to me again. Let's change that to: *I can apologise and either they accept it, or I can leave it behind me and move on.*

Like everything, this can take practice. The next time you find yourself thinking negatively about something try to look at it in a more positive way. ➡



Take that chance to open up

Emotional Care It's Good To Connect

We have to remember how important our emotional health is, and how helpful and healing it can be just to share our thoughts, concerns, worries or feelings, whether that is with other family members, friends or colleagues.

Just having someone else taking the time to listen to us and support us, or trying to help with ideas and guidance, can make a huge difference. Having people around us to offer emotional support can really make us feel better about a situation, or indeed ourselves. We are here to love and be loved, in whatever way or at whatever level we choose to!

We can often think that people aren't interested, can be annoyed listening to us, or that they won't understand what we are going through. But the truth is, unless you take that chance to open up, you are never going to know.

Feeling socially and emotionally connected to others is an important element in our daily lives. Building close ties with others releases hormones such as oxytocin, serotonin and dopamine into our bloodstream. These not only make us feel good and help us to develop close bonds and relationships with others as mentioned above, they also have a positive effect on our immune system and physical health.

It is important you find activities, hobbies or areas of interest that benefit you, or allow you to have social interaction with others. It can just be simple things like meeting up with friends for lunch, going to the cinema, treating yourself to a massage or sitting quietly reading.

These types of activities can make us feel better, more relaxed and more centred, all of which in turn makes us feel more positive. Have fun, and put yourself first for a change – you deserve it!



Find new self-acceptance

Spiritual Self Care

If we are looking to improve our quality of life, we can't ignore our spiritual selves. We are not purely physical beings. We are actually infinite spiritual beings also and we are here to make a difference.

Sometimes through social conditioning, we forget this important aspect of ourselves. People are becoming more open to the idea of connecting to our Higher Self and the need to nurture ourselves not just physically and emotionally, but also spiritually.

There are many spiritual paths and directions to choose from that can help us understand what our true purpose in life is. Some choose to use alternative methods of self-development and healing such as working with colour, crystals, angels or starting regular meditation or spiritual practice. Others may choose to follow a recognised faith-based religion.

As with everything, there is no right and no wrong way. The most important thing is to find what fits for you. Someone who is aware of their life purpose can have an increased knowledge and acceptance of self which allows them to embrace life with all its challenges. Just one small action or gesture of love and kindness can make a difference. You can make a difference by just being your own true authentic self!

Physical Heart

If we are focusing on self love and self care, we can't ignore our physical heart or our physical health. Another way of boosting your self esteem is to accept that you can make changes to improve your physical health. Little changes can all make a difference.

Our heart has an important job to do, as it pumps the blood that carries oxygen to all our organs, cells and tissues. When we improve our heart health it helps to lower blood pressure, cholesterol and fat levels in our body and it balances out our sugar levels too.

You don't have to run a marathon! Any aerobic exercise will improve your heart health. It can be walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, yoga, gardening, the list is endless. The important thing is that you should find something that you enjoy doing that will work for you.

Get your heart pumping



Mindfulness And Meditation

Although physical exercise is great for us, we also need to allow ourselves time just to be quiet and still. Everything needs to be balanced. Most of us lead very hectic lives, so another aspect of self love is to take care of our mental health.

We have touched on the power of positive self-talk and affirmations. Another way to achieve this is mindfulness or meditation. Amazingly, any form of meditation benefits us not only mentally but also emotionally, physically and spiritually. You don't need any special equipment as mindfulness can be introduced into everyday activities such as walking, doing

the dishes, listening to music and so on.

To try the simplest form of mindful meditation you can sit or lie comfortably, play soothing music if it helps, and just focus on your breath. Start to breathe at a slower pace, and deeper than you normally would. This sends a signal to the brain to start to slow down and relax. There are some great apps to help get you started.

Research has shown this lowers anxiety and stress, lowers blood pressure and heart rate, increases a feeling of calmness but also improves concentration. Regular meditation practice also increases self-awareness, self-esteem and yes, self-love!



And breathe...