

Respect Yourself

Respect: “to feel or show esteem for; to honor; to show consideration for; to avoid violation of.” We all want to be respected and we expect it in our interactions with others. When others treat us disrespectfully, it is not unusual to feel offended. Now, let’s get more personal. How well do you respect yourself? Don’t be too quick to answer. You may be offending yourself in ways that you never considered. I invite you to read on.

It is common knowledge that a significant percentage of chronic health conditions and diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, and lung disease are preventable. The same can be said for various conditions that impact our emotional health and mental functioning. My goal is to help you to see how your day-to-day choices can be either respecting or offending to yourself. Care given to our physical bodies affects our emotional health and mental functioning. So, it makes sense to examine our lifestyle choices for areas where a modification could prevent problems and avert the need for medication or other interventions. These lifestyle choices include ordinary things like the foods we eat, the quality of sleep we get, and the amount of physical activity we engage in, etc.

Our physical bodies are amazingly complex and require a variety of foods from all the food groups and adequate hydration to function properly. Foods we ingest also affect brain chemistry which can influence mood. Therefore, a diet lacking in needed nutrients and fiber can have adverse effects on us physically, mentally, and emotionally. Multivitamins and various supplements can also be beneficial. Your doctor can make recommendations about this. An informative on-line resource on nutrition can be found at www.choosemyplate.gov .

The use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and/or other drugs can impact energy level, sleep quality, mental functioning, mood, etc. Caffeine in the form of coffee and tea beverages, sodas such as colas and Mt. Dew, and energy drinks such as Red Bull continues to enjoy popularity among people of all ages. As commonplace and socially accepted as these libations are, the caffeine they contain is a drug. Caffeine can supply temporary energy and mental alertness, but too much can cause feelings of agitation, restlessness, and anxiety. If you are sensitive to caffeine or drink it later in the day, there is a good possibility it will also rob you of needed sleep at night. If you have anxiety issues, caffeine and poor sleep are two things you should do your best to avoid.

Speaking of sleep, ensuring that we get enough is another important self care strategy that cannot be underestimated. Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of quality sleep per night. Without adequate sleep, we become physically fatigued, mentally sluggish, irritable, easily stressed, and more prone to feelings of depression and anxiety. Problems with sleep are very common but there are strategies you can try to help yourself get needed rest. An informative on-line resource is www.sleepassociation.org .

In addition to good nutrition and adequate sleep, physical activity is necessary for healthy bodies and minds. Our bodies were made to move and the virtues of frequent exercise have been touted for years. In addition to the physical benefits of better health and fitness, exercise improves mental alertness, increases energy, dissipates stress, promotes a sense of well-being and self esteem and is also beneficial to alleviate feelings of anxiety or depression. A free exercise tracking resource is available at www.sparkpeople.com.

Other physiological things that could be affecting your mental health and mood include thyroid dysfunction and the hormonal changes of Premenstrual Syndrome or menopause. Other health conditions or side effects from prescribed medications could also be the cause. Talk to your doctor if you feel any of these issues could be occurring.

The strategies below focus more on nurturing your mind and are just as important for living a balanced, happy life.

- Reduce anxiety and stress by developing a workable routine for daily and weekly tasks (mealtimes, rising and bedtimes, housekeeping chores, etc.).
- Schedule in time for recreation (hobbies, relaxation, socializing, vacations).
- Spend time nurturing close relationships with others (family, friends, etc.).
- Adopt an attitude of gratitude about life. Be thankful for what you have and avoid focusing on what is lacking.
- Keep things in perspective.
- Challenge yourself with something different or unfamiliar like a new hobby, a new skill, taking a class or researching an area of interest.
- Invest in the lives of others through volunteering, mentoring, etc.
- Draw upon your spiritual resources for meaning and a sense of purpose and hope.
- Learn and practice good communication skills and conflict resolution in your relationships.
- Keep a healthy sense of humor.

Now, back to the original question: How well do you respect yourself? Have you identified ways you may be offending yourself? If so, making small, incremental changes to address any lack or excess may be all that is needed to improve your overall well being. Gradual changes are more likely to produce better, long lasting results. Of course, there are times when our self care efforts are not sufficient to address a physical, mental, or emotional problem. In those cases, it is wise to seek additional help and support from medical and/or mental health professionals.

Time spent in the mental health field continues to raise my awareness of the complex connections between the physical, the mental, and the emotional self. I wish I could say that I always make good choices. But, I have become more mindful of my choices and this has resulted in wiser choices more often. You are a wonderful human being. Respect yourself! You're worth it.

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