

A roadmap from struggle to serenity to help liberate you from stress and anxiety



When you recover and discover something that nourishes your soul and brings you joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life.

~Jean Shinoda Bolen

elf care. It's one of those terms that you likely either love or loathe.

Are you the sort of person who's convinced that without investing some time in selfcare, there'll be ramifications down the line? And you won't be the only one who has to deal with the consequences. Those you love and work with will be impacted when your mental, physical or emotional health breaks down. So you let nothing get in the way of caring for yourself.

Or do you believe that self-care is for wimps?

Perhaps you're somewhere in between: you believe caring for yourself is important, but you've got other priorities that you need to address first. Then self-care gets bumped down the list and doesn't happen at all or only very rarely.

I used to be one of the latter. And a lot of my clients live that way, too.

Which is fine... until something sideswipes you and your health spirals down.

All too often, the things that topple you are high levels of chronic stress from work and your personal life. But sometimes it's being diagnosed with a serious illness. Or something nebulous like chronic fatigue or fibromyalgia where it's clear that something is off, but it's hard to know what the cause was.

Living in a near-constant state of being stressed-out and having far too much on your plate has an uncanny knack of making you anxious, tired and irritable. Which isn't fun for you or those close to you.

When we feel stressed, we each have our coping mechanisms. We've developed these throughout our lives. Some are healthy, and some are maladaptive.



There are many ways we attempt to manage stress and distress, like:

- procrastination,
- crying,
- lashing out,
- taking stimulants to try to enhance alertness and self-efficacy,
- venting to a trusted friend,
- joining support groups,
- · comfort eating,
- drinking more.

Many healthy coping mechanisms involve spending high-quality time with other people. These could be friends, family, coworkers, therapists, allies going through a similar experience, or even complete strangers.

Talking, hugging, praying, being creative, moving... These are all forms of self-care. And important ways to look after your emotional and mental health.

But since early 2020, these nurturing activities have been culled in many places. This is a part of government attempts around the world to eliminate a virus.

Meanwhile, the world has become an even more stressful and unpredictable place. Feeling optimistic and hopeful takes a lot more work. It's easy to feel overwhelmed, worried, despondent, and despairing.

Well, now is precisely the right time to focus on self-care. Not only for your own wellbeing. But also so that you can support those you care about better.

Because self-care allows you to operate from a state of inner equilibrium. You're in a much better position to meet other people's needs when you've taken care of your own first.

Once you start to practice self-care regularly, you'll realise how important it is and begin to protect it. Then you'll wonder how you ever survived without it.

In this workbook, I'll walk you through how to create your own personalised self-care vision board.

But first, a bit about what self-care is and what it isn't.



WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care involves all the things we do to take care of our mental, emotional and physical health.

It's not about being narcissistic or believing that your needs are more important than other people's. And it's not about preventing other people from having their needs met.

There are a great variety of self-care practices to suit all personalities and budgets. They don't have to be particularly time-consuming and don't need a lot of planning.

Self-care can be sensory, emotional, physical, spiritual or social.

It's about rediscovering what brings you joy. And it needs to fit your lifestyle and values.

But sometimes, you may need to adjust your lifestyle to make more room for self-care. This might entail reducing or getting rid of commitments and habits that are unnecessary or even harmful.

The payoffs from regular self-care are many. This list isn't exhaustive:

- Even when times are tough and you're faced with emotional challenges, you'll feel more resilient and better able to cope.
- You'll feel less stressed and more relaxed. Imagine instead feeling calmer, more competent and more self-assured.
- Life will be more enjoyable.
- When you take good care of yourself, you're less likely to feel anxious and depressed.
- Self-care practices even increase empathy and compassion for others as well as yourself.
- Reduced stress combined with many self-care practices can improve your immune function. Which is even more vital during the pandemic. And during winter, when most of us are starting to feel run down.

Here's how to create your self-care vision board

If you feel "burnout" setting in, if you feel demoralised and exhausted, it is best, for the sake of everyone, to withdraw and restore yourself. The point is to have a long-term perspective.

DALAI LAMA

DR CATRIONA WALSH



Step 1. Brainstorm self-care activities

Come up with a list of potential self-care activities. Don't censor yourself too much. In fact, be as bold and creative as you like that way you have the opportunity to try out new things. Don't overthink it. Simply go with the flow and add what feels good and natural to you.

Read through the list and focus on activities you think you'd genuinely enjoy and that fit with your lifestyle and values. It's fine if they make you feel nervous or excited. But if they fill you with dread and you even feel yourself physically shrinking away from them, strike them from the list.



If you're having trouble coming up with ideas, I've included a list of self-care activities you can use for inspiration. You'll find them in the resources section at the end of this workbook.





Step 2. Decide whether you're going to make a physical or digital vision board.

Originally, vision boards were made using pictures from magazines and photographs glued on to a piece of paper or card. So they were like a collage. Alternatively, you could pin them on to a corkboard. You can still make vision boards this way. Get inspiration from magazines, photos or draw your own pictures. How about printing out free stock photos from sites like unsplash.com, pixabay.com and pixels.com?

These days, you can also make digital vision boards. And there are lots of apps and websites that will help you curate your digital vision board. You can even download the finished product and print it out. Or keep a virtual version on your phone, tablet, or computer to look at whenever you like. I'll link to some online vision boards and apps in the resources section at the end if you'd like to go this route.



Step 3. Collect images

Next look for images that remind you of your chosen self-care activities. Try to find ones that inspire and resonate with you.

Step 4. Collect words

Your vision board doesn't have to be limited to only images. Although, of course, it can be if you wish. Why not add words or phrases that reflect or relate to your chosen self-care activities? Choose fonts, colours, words and phrases you find inspiring.



Step 5. Assemble your vision board

Now that you've gathered your images and inspiring phrases, it's time to get creative. If you're crafting a physical vision board, you can use glue to attach them to a piece of paper or card, just like when you were a kid making collages.

To make a digital version, use one of the apps I've listed in the resources.



Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go is attainable, and you are worth the effort.

~Deborah Day

isplay your vision board somewhere prominent that's regularly visible to you. This is to remind you of the enjoyable things you've committed to doing. For example, stick it on the fridge door or on your office desk.

And you're done! Congratulations!

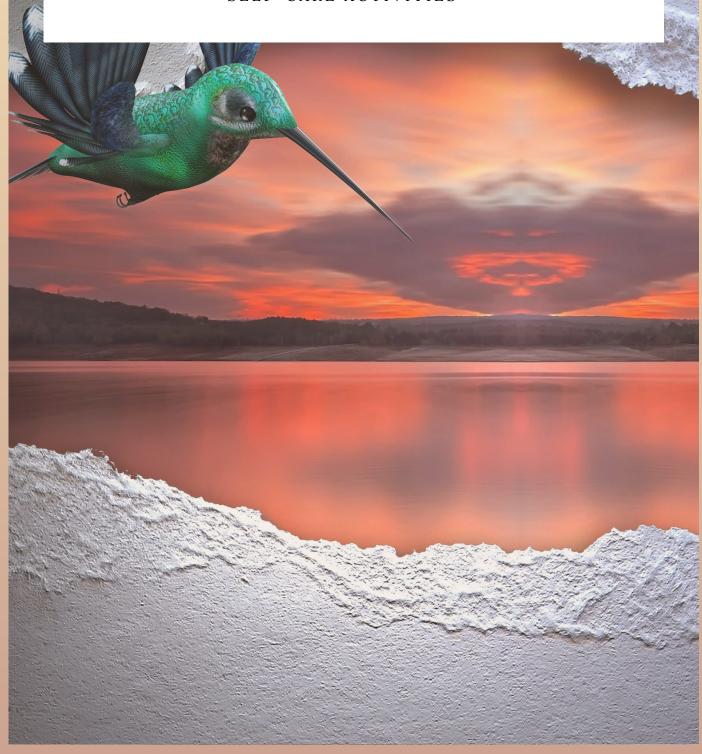
I hope you're excited to get started creating your vision board. And then getting stuck into some nurturing self-care activities. Before you know it, you'll be enjoying life more, feeling more relaxed and less overwhelmed, and more confident that you're making better choices for yourself.

You'll also discover that your capacity to be there for other people and your productivity in work have increased. Because you can't do your best work when you're miserable, exhausted, and underperforming.

Now, which self-care activity would you like to start with?

Resources Section

SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES





Emotional Self-Care

- Learn to say "no" with elegance.
- Develop a relaxing evening ritual.
- Intentionally schedule regular protected "me-time" on your calendar or planner.
- Practice deep breathing exercises.
- Practice mindfulness to help anchor you in the present moment.
- Reward yourself for completing small tasks.
- Keep a gratitude journal to remind yourself of the good things in life.
- Learn something new (there are lots of online tutorials you can use. Or you can take up a class).
- Allow yourself to feel all your feelings and express them without judgment (in a safe and appropriate environment).
- Try adult colouring books or mandalas. These can help with anxiety and/or stress relief.
- Do something creative, like writing, knitting, woodwork, or sculpture.
- Read a book.
- Listen to music.
- Sing.
- Stop being your harshest critic. We all make mistakes.
- Limit your exposure to the news.
- Join a laughter yoga class.
- Allow yourself time to daydream with intention.
- Delegate some chores at home or in work to someone else hire someone if that's an option.

Examples of self-care activities

Physical Self-Care

- Cook and eat real food.
- Do some stretching exercises.
- Eat mindfully and with gratitude.
- Have an Epsom salts bath.
- Go for a walk.
- Stay hydrated and drink water regularly throughout the day.
- Do restorative exercise, like yoga, tai chi, qiqonq, or pilates.
- Exhaust yourself physically. Do whatever helps you feel fatigued.
- Garden. If you don't own a garden, see if you can get access to an allotment.
- Have a relaxing massage.
- Get outside in the middle of the day and spend at least 10 minutes under the sun.
- Go for a bike ride to nowhere in particular.
- Spend time in nature. For example, hiking, backpacking, camping, canoeing, sailing, surfing, or whatever floats your boat.
- Go to bed early.
- Enjoy some aromatherapy, Indian head massage, reflexology, or another relaxing activity.
- Have acupuncture.
- Switch screens off 60-90 minutes before bed.



Social Self-Care

- Avoid toxic people.
- Limit your time on social networks like Facebook and Twitter.
- Ask for help from family, friends, or at work.
- Call a trusted friend, family member, or therapist to talk things out.
- Choose who you spend your time with today. Spend time with people who are enthusiastic and positive.
- Intentionally reconnect with someone you've lost touch with or have unresolved conflict with.
- Join an online or physical support group for people who are going through what you're going through.
- Connect with a friend in your workplace and spend some time with them.
- Schedule a regular date night with your significant other.
- Hug someone you care about (or a furry friend).
- Take a road trip with your friends or family.
- Schedule in some time off work.
- Volunteer.
- Learn assertiveness skills.

Examples of self-care activities

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for meditation every day.
- Spend some time in quiet contemplation.
- Do a 10-minute body scan technique to check in with each part of your body.
- Go forest bathing.
- Practice being non-judgmental.
- Do something nice for someone in secret.
- Read an uplifting book.
- Donate money to a charity of your choosing.
- Practice letting go. Try to be less attached to outcomes and accept the present.
- Help someone in some way. It can be someone you know or a random act of kindness towards a stranger.
- Find an opportunity to use your strengths, the things that energise you, more often.
- Pray.
- Practice yoga, tai chi and similar disciplines.
- Chanting and mantras.
- Journal.
- Have a digital detox.
- Play.

HERE ARE SOME ONLINE VISION BOARD APPS AND WEBSITES FOR YOU TO TRY

Canva

https://www.canva.com/search/templat es?q=vision%20boards&organic=true

Pickmonkey

https://www.picmonkey.com/blog/howto-make-a-digital-vision-board

• Dream It Alive

https://www.dreamitalive.com

- Visuapp available on iOS and Android
- Corkulous https://www.corkulous.com
- **iWish** (not available in the UK) http://www.iwishbucketlist.com
- Subliminal Vision Boards https://www.subliminalvisionboards.com
- Pinterest pinterest.com
- Or you can build a presentation using apps like PowerPoint, Keynote or Google Slides.



Hi, I'mDr Catriona Walsh:

A Belfast-based former paediatric consultant turned nutrition and lifestyle coach. My fields of expertise are:

- burnout management and prevention,
- gadolinium toxicity,
- · chronic fatigue, and
- hypermobility.

I love helping other professionals worn-out from juggling their careers and personal lives without stopping to take care of themselves. People who've had enough of feeling tired all the time, not enjoying life, and dragging themselves through the day collaborate with me to prioritise their health and break free from energydraining cycles of thoughts and behaviours. With my help, they feel energised, calmer, happier, and healthier.



Having studied medicine at Cambridge University and Queen's University, Belfast, I specialised in childhood allergy. But I gained a lot of my expertise the hard way through surviving burnout and medication side effects. Spurred on by my experiences dealing with toxicity from an MRI contrast, I wrote the book, Contrasts: More than meets the MRI. Sky News and The Daily Mail have interviewed me about MRI contrast safety and side effects.

I also suffer from a punishing genetic condition called Ehlers Danlos Syndrome.

Despite these challenges, I've learned how to savour life again.

Now I blend my passion for lifestyle medicine, nutrition, and coaching with my experience in paediatric medicine and advanced life support. I find this the best approach for helping people to bulletproof their mental and physical health.

In 2018, I founded The Food Phoenix and I'm also co-creator of the Burnout Antidote.

What are your next steps?

I hope you find this guide super helpful. Perhaps it's the little push you need to put the wheels in motion that will set you on a different path in life. One that brings you less pressure, less work, better health, and more precious time with your family and friends.

I know most people accessing it will be able to get stuck straight in and start making some great changes. Which is awesome! After all, that's why I created it.

"We can't really give what we don't have. You've got to have a full, beautiful inner life that is for no-one else but you in order to give to anyone else. And you've got to ask for what you need."



But for some people, changing can be a bit harder.

Scratch that. Change is almost always difficult. Even when it's something that you yearn for. And despite it being something you know you have to do.

Change can be intimidating, even when it's exciting.

And research shows that motivation can drop off precipitously after your initial excitement wears off. Right about the time when overwhelm tends to start sneaking up on you.

No wonder some people know that they do better when they have someone to hold them accountable for making changes.

Also, some of us need a bit of extra handholding for support. Because it's so much easier to change when you know you've got allies. Maybe you'll find family members, friends, colleagues, and people in your community who can cheer you on. But not everyone is so fortunate.

Or perhaps what you need is to spend time delving into exactly how and why you should make changes. But you don't know where to start.

This can be especially true when it comes to your nutrition. There is so much conflicting information out there about what to eat and what to avoid. It's easy to end up confused.



Plus diet often needs to be personalised.

What works well for one person may not work well for someone else.

So working with a nutritionist can help you identify the right diet choices for you.

Or the diet that you used to thrive on stops working well for you. Truth be told, that's what happened to me after my gadolinium toxicity experience when the paleo/primal diet template I'd been following for the previous 6 years suddenly wasn't enough.

And that's why having a nutritionist and coach to help is the right decision for some people.

How you can work with me

So if you need some extra support, it's simple to get in touch with me about 1-to-1 coaching.

In fact, why hesitate? Schedule a free clarity call with me today. It's so easy and you've nothing to lose. Here's the link:

https://calendly.com/thefoodphoeni x/discovery-call

"And suddenly you know: It's time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings."

Meister Eckhart

Brené

Brown

"We can't really give what we don't have. You've got to have a full, beautiful inner life that is for no-one else but you in order to give to anyone else. And you've got to ask for what you need. And that is the biggest gift you'll give your children... is letting them observe your path to wholeness. And you're going to terrify some people with your authenticity. But man, will you feel alive.

You're on a journey towards wholeness. So don't look at it as selfishness, see it as making yourself whole."