

Practising Self-care

Self-help and self-care techniques are really important for our wellbeing and are an effective way of managing stress. But there's more to them than that.

When you've tried out the different techniques – perhaps with the help of a teacher, a group or a download - and found them helpful, you might want to learn more about how to make them a regular part of your life. You will soon start to discover that these techniques can do a lot more than help you through a particular moment of stress. If you pursue them, they can open up new ways of thinking about the world around you and transform the way you experience your life.

Making techniques like Meditation and Mindfulness part of your daily routine and getting the most out of them means taking them up as a regular practise. This isn't always easy, so here are some guidelines that we hope will support you. Many people also find it helpful to have regular support and guidance from more experienced practitioners, and to spend some time practising in a group.

Finding a place to practise

It can be helpful to practise in a particular place. Over time, the place we choose starts to build up its own particular atmosphere that can support us. You might have space in your home that you can set aside, but it doesn't matter if you don't. You can make a place for practise by making a temporary space. For instance lighting a candle; setting out pictures or objects that you associate with peacefulness or clarity; or covering an ordinary chair or table with a particular cloth. It helps if your place has fresh air and is clean and uncluttered. And you will need some time when you will be undisturbed in it. Your place for practise could also be outside.

Finding a practice

In deciding to take up a regular practise, you are setting an intention to take care of your own highest good and to work towards your own deepest purpose. It doesn't matter if you don't know exactly what that is when you start out. It will gradually reveal itself as you practise, in ways that you probably won't be expecting. Your intention is what matters most. It's more important than the particular type of practise you decide to do.

There are many different ways of practising. Sitting meditation, even if it's only 5 minutes, is really important for helping you focus your mind. But other practises, such as mindfulness, imagery, walking meditation, and practises such as Qigong, Tai Chi and Yoga are also very useful. Experiment with different things and see what works best for you. This can change over time. It can take a while to establish a practise. Be patient with yourself and keep trying until you find what works best for you.

Maintaining a practice

Despite our best intentions it can be difficult to establish a practice in our lives. It can almost feel as if there is something deliberately working against us and getting in the way of us doing the thing we want and intend to do. This is known as resistance and pretty much everybody experiences it in some form at some time. It helps to remember this. Fighting against your resistance is usually less helpful than acknowledging and accepting you feel resistance, and going ahead and doing the practice anyway.

Especially in the beginning, it can help to make a date with yourself for practice. You can even put it in your diary. Having a regular time can also help. Decide a time and a place to do your practise in advance, and then just go ahead and do it. Even if you don't feel like it. Even if you have no idea what you are doing. That's all part of the practise. The most important thing is just to do it.

If you're not going to be able to do your practise, make this a conscious decision. You might think "No. Today I am too tired. I'm going to stay in bed and rest". Then staying in bed and resting becomes your practise for that day, because you are doing it consciously for your own highest good.

Appreciate yourself for whatever practise you manage to do. Sometimes, practising can feel incredibly challenging. Other times it can feel fantastic. It's tempting to judge ourselves for this, but we're really not equipped to make this judgement. Be grateful to yourself that you have made this time for your own health and healing, and trust that your practise is unfolding as it should and that all will be well.