

The best gift for year-end is self-care (excerpt)

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Self-care is a term originally used in medical care. In recent years, it has become a widely known concept for personal wellbeing, a vital key in mind and body wellness. How do we practise self-care at year-end? Why is self-care not as difficult as we perceive? Mindfulness experts, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists explained in the interviews. Let's experience the benefits of self-care and remind ourselves that the busier we are, the greater need for self-care. Isn't looking after ourselves well, the best gift for our loved ones?

Do you know what is self-care?

Self-care can be defined as caring for, protecting and keeping oneself fit. According to the World Health Organisation, self-care is defined as promoting and maintaining health, preventing diseases and the ability of one in coping with diseases and disabilities regardless of the support from healthcare providers.

Simply put, it's ourselves protecting and maintaining our health.

US nursing care expert, Dr Dorothea. E. Orem started the framework of self-care in 1959, and pointed out in 1980 that the objectives of the series of activities to maintain one's health and happiness are to promote wellness and aid in the early detection and treatment of diseases and is the primary level of health resources in the healthcare system.

Dr Irene Tirtajana, psychiatrist from Ng Teng Fong General Hospital said, "The term self-care originates from healthcare institutions but with greater public awareness on psychological and physical wellbeing, self-care has taken a broader meaning. Any activities consciously engaged to promote mind and body wellness can be classified as self-care.

She said, "These activities are not indulging oneself but help to reduce stress and promote wellbeing. This not only helps people around us but also ensure that we have sufficient energy and stamina for important things in our lives. More and more people are aware that psychological and physical wellbeing need to be managed and cannot be taken for granted."

The four areas of self-care

For businesses, the rising importance of self-care has become a marketing tool.

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A/Prof Angie Chew, CEO, Brahm Centre stressed that self-care emphasises on total wellness. Hence one's act and speech should be "nourishing", besides promoting activities that benefit mind and body wellness, one's words have to benefit one's wellbeing too.

Ideas for year-end self-care

As the year draws to an end, it could be busier than usual, the convergence of the new and old may evoke sentiments, hence we should place greater emphasis on self-care for people around us and ourselves.

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Dr Tirtajana said, "During festive season, sometimes it can be more stressful, hence doing less is more. Basically it's understanding what to do to make ourselves more emotionally balanced. Self-care is not for special situations or occasions, rather it should be cultivated over time."

- Reduce screen-time, increase physical activities

If you are usually sedentary, you should take the opportunity to increase your activity level eg. exercising or gardening. The actual activities should be based on one's preference, selecting those that will make us happy.

Connecting to nature, staying away from screens (including handphones, tablets, laptops and TVs) is beneficial for physical and psychological wellbeing. One can try having a simple gathering with family or friends to bond.

Dr Tirtajana said, "Everyone has their own familiar self-care routine, over time one will know other new activities that are suitable. The important thing to remember is that you are doing these activities for yourself, and not to please others."

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- Select information that makes you happy

There are many news on social media, just as not piling your plate during buffets, one should also mindfully select content that are beneficial to us while navigating through the plethora of news. Some news or messages will only make us angry or sad and we may be better off to disregard these.

A/Prof Angie Chew said, "Like the garden, there are flowers and there are weeds. In this world, there are the good and the bad. The key is choosing what to focus on. Rather than being disgruntled, why don't we put our mind and energy on things that we can learn from and make a difference. Personally I choose to focus on what I can do and try to use positive speech to encourage others."

- Give thanks generously

Asians may not be used to compliments. But accepting compliments graciously and express thanks, may benefit oneself and make others happy too.

A/Prof Angie Chew said, "Maybe it's the Asian culture, from young we don't get complimented often, which is why we don't give compliments nor accept compliments easily."

She suggested, "Just say thanks when you get a compliment and allow yourself to immerse in the warmth and nourishment from it."

Giving family and friends the gift of self-care

- Spend happy times together

Life is busy and time is a precious and irreplaceable gift. Rather than spending one hour to select a gift, why not use that hour to spend happy times with your family and friends. In planning the outing, one can consider less common activities such as going to the farm or museum.

A/Prof Angie Chew suggests selecting more active and positive activities such as choosing an inspirational movie and during a gathering, focus on topics that bring joy. She reminds that even if the other party said something that you dislike or disagree, you don't have to retort.

She said, "Listening is good enough. There is no need to voice your disagreement and argue non-stop."

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- Take the initiative to give compliments and say thanks

Do you remember when was the last time you said thanks or gave a compliment?

A/Prof Angie Chew said, "We should not voice only in situations that we disagree on. We should focus on good people and good deeds and to give affirmation when we come across these. It will not only make the other party happy but it puts you in a good mood too."

She cited a recent example, "In the workplace, I saw the cleaning supervisor and I complimented her team for keeping the office clean. She was so happy to hear this and said that few voluntarily give praises. Most people only complain when there's a problem."

A/Prof Angie Chew said, "Just like the weather cannot be sunny every day, we should not just focus on the things that do not go well. We should take note of the beautiful things and take initiative to express gratitude and thanks. This not only generates positive energy but creates an uplifting circle, triggering a cycle of positivity and doubling its energising effect, benefitting more people."