

### Tips for How to Practice Self Care and Why It's Important Today

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Most clinicians we talk with say the most gratifying part of their work is treating patients. No matter how frustrated they are navigating the changes in healthcare, the many stressors and challenges they've experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or dealing with increased administrative tasks, most still love the time they spend with patients—and their commitment to patient care and safety is palpable.

It's no surprise that once they learn how their own well being can impact patient care, most are interested in seeing what they can do to better manage their stress and avoid burnout.



The American Medical Association states 80% of burnout is caused by organizational processes, culture and structure.<sup>1</sup> We know savvy organizations recognize it is necessary to set the conditions for their clinicians to thrive and are working hard to make improvements. However, these changes won't happen overnight and even under the best of conditions the occupation of medical practice is a stressful one.

#### What can you do to prevent and mitigate the impact of stress and burnout?

You may be familiar with the work of Glen Gabbard, MD, who first talked about the compulsivity triad possessed by many physicians, consisting of doubt, feelings of guilt and an exaggerated sense of responsibility<sup>2</sup>. Gabbard says this triad can lead to difficulty in:

- Relaxing
- Reluctance to take vacations from work
- Problems in allocating time to family
- Excessive sense of responsibility for things beyond one's control
- Chronic feels of "not doing enough"
- Difficulty setting limits
- Feelings of guilt which interfere with the health pursuit of pleasure

Whatever is driving it, most clinicians will say their desire to "get it right" will often drive them to overworking, stress and even anxiety. This is true even as clinicians have less patient face time, less control over surrounding circumstances of patient care and mounting fears of adverse events.

Whether your stress is coming from external pressures or internal thought processes, or perhaps something outside of work, it's important to have a solid plan for self care.

#### Self Care Recommendations

- Reflect on what you have power over in order to reduce anxiety and worry.
  - Let go of perfectionism. This is different than letting go of working hard or striving for excellence. Perfectionism can lead you to overwork by expending energy on minor details that sometimes need to be ignored due to time constraints, or by doing the work of others for fear their efforts will not meet your unrealistic standards.
  - Try to recognize the situations beyond your control and find a way to let go and move on in these situations. Work on utilizing nurses and ancillary staff more productively.

- Foster relaxation, acceptance and less reactivity through mindfulness practices. Learn more about the benefits of mindfulness from [Stanford Medicine](#) and our article, [Mindfulness in Medicine](#). There are many short, informal mindfulness practices you can do throughout the day to elicit the relaxation response and help you stay present in the moment. Take a look at this [Mindfulness Monday Video Series](#) for a few short, practical exercises.
- If you have too many commitments make a list of ways to reduce time commitments and set boundaries. Identify areas for time reduction both at work as well as away from work. Identify areas of assistance that could be provided by family, colleagues, nurses and administrators, and take steps to acquire their help. The key here is to be intentional about it; make the request, and recognize having a manageable schedule is paramount to your well being – and for those around you at work and at home.
- Utilize your WorkLife Concierge services through VITAL WorkLife. This is a huge timesaver, especially during the pandemic, for helping you with everyday tasks like completing errands, to bigger ticket items like event and travel planning, accessing eldercare or childcare resources and more.
- Seek out someone who cares and understands and talk with them. Suppressing emotions is not a beneficial coping mechanism. Talk to a trusted loved one, or contact VITAL WorkLife for peer coaching or counseling.
- Count your blessings. Gratitude is a mood and energy lifter.
- Make time for fun. Did you know that laughter leads to greater relaxation, an improved immune system, better mood and strengthened life satisfaction?<sup>3</sup>
- Spend time with friends and loved ones. Studies show engaging in social relationships can positively impact health and well being and reduce stress.<sup>4</sup>
- Set goals for change through the VITAL WorkLife App. You are ten times more likely to make behavior change when you have preset goals.
- Reward yourself for self care. Determine what your reward will be for achieving your self care goals.
- Lastly, have an accountability system to help you stay focused on self care – a friend, family member, mentor, coach or counselor. Someone who can hold you accountable to the changes you want to make.

Although you may not always feel this way, you truly have tremendous influence over mood and energy, regardless of the circumstances you find yourself in. For many of us, self care can slip away if we are not intentional about keeping it front and center.

## We Can Help

Contact us at 877.731.3949 or through the VITAL WorkLife App to access your resources, including Peer Coaching, face-to-face or virtual counseling, in-the-moment behavioral health support, WorkLife Concierge and more, today.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> <https://wire.ama-assn.org/life-career/address-burnout-s-underlying-causes-look-team-based-care>

<sup>2</sup> *The Physician as Patient: A clinical Handbook for Mental Health Professionals*, Michael Myers, MD, and Glen Gabbard, MD; 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkins J, et al. *Humor theories and the physiological benefits of laughter. Holistic Nursing Practice.* 2009;23:349.

<sup>4</sup> Holt-Lunstad J, et al. *Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. Journal of PMed.* July 26, 2010.