

Drink, Eat, Sleep: Mastering Essential— and Sacred—Self-Care Practices

By Heath and Nicole Reed



Self-care is not being selfish; rather, self-care is being self-aware.

Have you noticed, though, that many of the fundamental cues our body communicates are often ignored, discounted, pushed to the side, or completely overridden? For some, giving or doing something good for themselves may be entangled with feelings of selfishness, childishness, or complete impracticality. What if, instead, self-care was a declaration of your alignment and connection with yourself, nature, and all your relations?

We invite you to consider your self-care practice as an opportunity to listen and respond to your body's messages. We encourage you to recognize how cravings, ideas, movements—and even pain, tightness, and feeling stressed—are invitations to do something good for yourself.

THE STORY OF THREE BROTHERS

Three brothers reunite after studying with three different masters. As they are catching up with one another, they begin to share the incredible feats of their masters. The first brother declares, “My master is so great, he can balance upside down on a single finger—with a wild mountain lion perched upon his feet! He is truly a great master!” The second brother proclaims, “My master is so great, he can walk across the great Ganges River without a single droplet of water touching his feet! The man walks on water! Surely he is a great master.” Not to be outdone, the third brother shares, “My master is so great, she drinks when she is thirsty, eats when she is hungry, and sleeps when she is tired. This is truly the life of a master!”

Drinking when thirsty, eating when hungry, and sleeping when tired might not sound miraculous, but how often do we actually live up to these seemingly basic investments in our self-care?

DRINK WHEN YOU ARE THIRSTY

The average adult human is approximately 60 percent water, blood is 90 percent water, and the planet is covered in just over 70 percent water. Perhaps the ubiquitous nature of water is one of the many reasons it is easy to forget to drink it.

Throughout any given day, water is vital to our life force, our intuition, and every system in our body. Water carries nutrients to every cell, flushes bacteria from the bladder, and maintains a happy digestion. Water assists in lubricating our joints, delivers free energy in the form of oxygen to the entire body, moisturizes tissues, and so much more.

Nicole recently challenged herself to drink half her body weight in ounces of water each day, and the results have been life changing! Her skin has cleared, elimination is more regular, she has dropped some weight, and happily, her sleep is no longer disrupted by leg cramps. Nicole uses an app on her phone to help keep track of water intake, which reminds her to drink throughout the day. At the end of the day, the app reminds her to celebrate her new self-awareness.

EAT WHEN YOU ARE HUNGRY

We all understand that hunger is our body’s request for fuel. When our stomach goes empty—and our energy resources (found in our bloodstream) are depleted—we get a reminder from our gut that it is time to eat. By listening to these natural urges, we can become “intuitive eaters.”

Intuitive eaters “are aware of and trust their body’s internal hunger and satiety cues and use these cues to determine when and how much to eat.”¹ Current research indicates that intuitive eaters are less prone to binge, have a lower body mass index (BMI), and have less disordered eating. Intuitive eaters also experience more body appreciation, self-compassion, and optimism, and have higher self-esteem.

Sometimes we feel hungry even though our bellies are full. Consider that hunger pangs might have less to do with caloric intake and more to do with the desire to feel nourished. Practice becoming aware of your eating habits and choices. Perhaps, the next time you think you are hungry, check in with your own intuitive eater. Ask yourself:

- Am I hungry? (It has been our experience that sometimes we are actually thirsty.)
- Why am I eating? (We might eat because we are bored, celebrating, sad, etc.)
- Is it a good time for me to eat? (Consider the timing. Are you eating simply because others are eating?)
- Is my food nourishing? (Food should make you feel energized and happy—not tired or guilty.)
- How am I eating? (The place—and your pace—when eating, should feel safe, kind, and comfortable.)
- Am I eating enough or too much? (Although we are all born with a set of instincts to eat and self-regulate our food intake, our cues can become muddled.)

Growing an awareness about eating and cravings is a big leap forward in establishing more trust and confidence. This awareness nourishes a relationship with our body that is responsive, kind, and generous.

Stop the Hamster Wheel—and Sleep

You are ready to go to sleep, but your mind is spinning faster than a hamster wheel. How can you slow the pace to catch those much-needed Z's? One effective sleep strategy we use to calm the overactive mind and harmonize the body is a self-acupressure practice called jin shin jyutsu.

In traditional Chinese medicine, the five elements correspond with the five fingers. By contacting them with the following mindful approach, we can relax and restore the free flow of circulation throughout our entire mind and body. To use this practice:

- Lie down and rest both palms on your belly, as you hold one finger with your opposite hand. It does not matter which hand or finger you start or end on, but you do want to move through each finger one at a time using your breath to help follow your body's sensations.
- Hold each finger for 1–3 minutes each or until you feel a pulsing sensation shift in the finger being held. Hold as much of the finger as possible without squeezing it with the opposite hand, and use gentle contact. If you sense a pulsation in your finger, continue holding it until you notice it begin to steady and become calm.

Oftentimes, we fall asleep holding a finger without ever making it to all 10 fingers, and this is no problem. This is success! Sleep has come!

If you *do* complete all 10 fingers, you can seal the first round by placing the fingertips of each hand into the center of the opposite palm, so your palms are cupped facing one another. Maintain this circuit for a couple minutes, and then switch which hand is on top and on the bottom. If you make it through one full round, repeat again until you fall asleep.

SLEEP WHEN YOU ARE TIRED

Become masterful at living your best life by sleeping when you are tired. A busy, stressful life is the perfect excuse to rest your body. Napping and allowing for 6–8 hours of rest nightly has many benefits, including clearer thinking, enhanced immunity, increased productivity, and the probability of a healthier weight, lower blood pressure, and an increase in happiness.

SIMPLE IS SACRED

Your body is constantly communicating with you, offering at first gentle reminders that, if unanswered, can lead to clamoring, distress, or even disease. Experiencing your body as a friend who gives regular invitations and reminders to drink when thirsty, eat when hungry, and sleep when tired is one of the most essential and sacred self-awareness practices you can perform.

What messages does your body want you to hear? When you listen to your body attentively, you feel better, perform better, and are available to connect with the world around you and the people in it in nourishing ways. Simple and sacred acts of self-awareness lead to a masterful practice of self-care that provides far-reaching benefits for you and all those you help and care for. **m&b**

Note

1. Tracy L. Tylka and Ashley M. Kroon Van Diest, "The Intuitive Eating Scale–2: Item Refinement and Psychometric Evaluation with College Women and Men," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2013): 137-53; <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/fddc/dbbd4046dc7e5c08314dff836a25dc01d384.pdf>.

6 Heath and Nicole Reed are co-founders of Living Metta (living "loving kindness") and want everyone in the world to enjoy the experience of befriending their body. The Reeds lead workshops and retreats across the country and overseas, including Thailand and Mexico, and have been team-teaching touch and movement therapy for 16 years. In addition to live classes, the Reeds offer massage therapy and self-care videos, DVDs, and online trainings, which may be found at www.livingmetta.com.

Resources

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