

Self-care – Elissa Lowenstern

Whatever aspect of self-care you do, it is first about pausing, putting the brakes on the stress, overwhelm or demands of our lives. Taking a few moments to come back to ourselves and to bringing in some calm and peace. It is good if you can do a small thing at either end of each day and when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed throughout the day. Once you begin, you will become used to this being something you include just for you.

Emotions – learning to recognise them in yourself and release the ones that are not helpful – breathe in and as you breathe out, let out that emotion using some kind of sound. The more you do this the easier it gets. You will find the bigger the sound you let out, the more relief you will feel. I do it in my car with the radio on. Have a yell. Cry if you feel the need. Say all of your frustrations out loud. This is a good thing to do when you have pain. It is about finding a way to let out that pain.

Say to things to people in your life. Imagine them in front of you. Say what you might normally hold back on saying. Let it all out.

I explain this in the webinar 'Emotions, Stress & Inflammation'.

Sleep, sunlight, time in nature, quiet time

Deep breathing – socks off, feet on the ground (carpet), breathe up into the soles of your feet from the earth. In and out. Re direct your mind to the present moment. Using breath brings you back to yourself and away from all of the external demands and pressures in our worlds. As you breathe out, let go of all of your demands and pressures.

Be your own best friend – what are the qualities of a best friend for you? How would it look if you were this person for yourself when times are tough? What would you do? Put your arms around yourself. Do you recall a time when you were a best friend to yourself? Recall this time with your eyes closed.

Self-compassion – no judgment, tell your inner critic to bugger off! I talk to my joints. I caress them when they are sore. I used to hate them. I was ashamed of them once. Learn to be aware of how critical you are of yourself, so that you can use kinder words. Or, you can pause for a moment and remind yourself that you are doing your best. You are not perfect and your best is good enough.

Self-care routine – what is yours? Do you let it go when times are hard? Do you feel unworthy of self-care when RA isn't so good? Do you think you are protecting yourself by going inwards? A routine doesn't have to be long. In fact, in the beginning, the shorter it is the better. Five minutes at regular times. Even if you are tired as you go to bed. Just taking that 5 minutes for some self-care is good. It means you are loving and caring for yourself. You could listen to some peaceful music at bedtime. Or, one of the things I have listed here.

Play time – that is just for enjoyment & is completely unstructured (pure joy) Imagine something you would like.

Listen compassionately – to your own needs - what would help right now? How can you make it happen?) Do you ask others for what you need emotionally? Can you take some time out for yourself occasionally?

Light a candle for yourself whilst you prepare food. Listen to music you enjoy.

Mediation – can just be 5 minutes at each end of the day if that's all you have time for. Eyes closed, breathe in and out gently. Bring your awareness to you and to loving yourself. Allow everything else to fall away. Your mind will come in and out, but just let it do so.

If you feel overwhelm – put the palm of your hand across your forehead and sit for 5 minutes. There are acupuncture points on our forehead that is for calming. If you are physically able to, you can also put the other palm of a hand at the base of your skull. This area is the emotional seat of our brain and also has acu points to help with overwhelm. Placing a hand on the soles of each foot is grounding. Especially just under the ball of your foot. If you cannot reach, get someone else to hold these areas of each foot at the same time while you rest. This is where the kidney meridian begins and it is known as the grounding point because it connects us with the earth. If someone can do this for you it is nicer. So, you can close your eyes and relax for a few minutes.

Help – do you ask for help when you need it? Especially if you are having a difficult day with pain or medication side effects. Do you tell those close to you that you are in pain or not having a great day? It is important to express how we feel and have our needs met. This is especially important as mothers or caring for others. If you think of yourself in these roles as having a limited tank that contains your physical and emotional energy. The tank doesn't have a limitless supply. It doesn't just keep automatically re filling itself. We need to re fuel by sleeping and exercising. We need to do the same with our emotional energy. We need to top it up each day, so that we have enough to give out to children and others. So, a good way to think of self-care, is going to the petrol station when your car is low on fuel. Otherwise you cannot drive your car!

I hope some of these tips help. Please reach out for questions.