



# BE WELL, DO GOOD **SELF-CARE IDEAS**

—— *from Jessica Dolce* ——

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Self-care fills our own cup, so we can keep giving, making it a vital consideration for anyone connected to the animal welfare cause. Self-care isn't selfish, it's life-saving. And it can help us do better work for longer.

In our excitement to do as much good as we can for animals, many of us stop taking care of our own needs. Lack of interest in our own self-care is both a symptom of and a result of compassion fatigue. But self-sacrifice isn't sustainable.

Too often, taking care of ourselves gets regulated to the "optional" category: something to do if we have some free time, after our to-do list is all done, and when all the animals are safe, cared for, and don't need anything else from us. Which is never.

We create impossible conditions for self-care to exist. We dismiss self-care as unimportant or self-indulgent – something that only frivolous people do, but not for serious folks who are busy fixing the world. If that rings true for you, as it used to for me, then please hear this: Self-care is non-negotiable if you want to keep doing ethical, effective work. Simply put, self-care is a requirement of being a responsible, ethical animal caregiver. Self-care isn't selfish, it's life-saving. You know the cliché: you can't pour from an empty cup? Well, self-care is what refills your cup, so you can keep giving for a lifetime. Without it, compassion fatigue and burnout are inevitable and that leads to unethical, ineffective work.

Self-care doesn't have to be complicated, but it does require that we set aside a cushion of time and energy for ourselves, so we can attend to our own needs. Self-care is whatever fills you up with energy, restores your sense of self, or allows you to release or process the difficult emotions and stress of the day. It's what feels good to you in an authentic way.



## VEG OUT, WITH LIMITS

When we're feeling the effects of compassion fatigue it can be tempting to do nothing but binge on Netflix. While rest is a critical part of self-care, vegging out in front of a screen sometimes hurts more than it helps because it doesn't create energy or restore us in the same way that activities such as talking with friends or exercise does. So it can leave us in a mental and physical lurch.

Veg out, but with limits. Pick a show to watch and limit your Netflix to just one or two episodes at a time. Find a show that makes you laugh, or find a plot that totally absorbs you. Skip anything that reminds you of work or that exposes you to traumatic material.





## PICK UP AN EASY READER

Reading is one of the most popular kinds of self-care, but it's tough to do when you're stressed or exhausted. Always have something easy and captivating to read, no matter how preoccupied your brain is.



## ALWAYS HAVE SOMETHING FUN PLANNED

Our brains love to anticipate pleasure – it gives us a little dopamine kick. That's why thinking about the vacation we're going to take in a few months is often as good as the trip itself.

Try this: Make a list of 15 fun or relaxing things you want to do. It can be anything you like: a trip to the library, a Skype date with a long-distance friend, a yoga class, seeing a movie, buying new art supplies, a massage, a vacation, a recipe you want to try, a night out with friends at a restaurant you've been wanting to try...whatever makes you happy!

Now write them down in your schedule so that you have one fun thing to look forward to every week for the next 3 months. Savor the anticipation of knowing you'll be doing something pleasurable each week, then enjoy it when it rolls around. Remember: fun isn't frivolous. Enjoying ourselves fills our own cup, so we can keep giving.



## USE YOUR SENSES TO STAY PRESENT

When we're fully engaged in the present moment it means we're not rehashing the past or worrying about the future. One of my favorite ways to be mindful is to use my senses to reconnect with my present moment experience.

If you love scents, start your day with fabulous smelling bar of soap from Lush, use a citrus essential oil blend in a mini diffuser to help invigorate you during a mid-day slump, end each work day with a quick hand massage using scented hand cream, or go to bed with a soothing lavender oil diffuser. At each moment, pause, inhale, and enjoy this little treat.

Play with sounds, textures of fabrics, or sights – whatever genuinely delights you and helps brings your attention into these small, but wonderful present moment experiences.



## STRETCH SO YOU DON'T SNAP

We're all a ball of stress. Not sure what to do about it? Pay attention and attend to your body. Here's a simple five-minute video to help you loosen up physically and mentally. Bookmark it and use it anytime you know you need to relax.





## SAY 'NO'

"No." That's a full sentence. Crazy, huh? One of the best ways to take care of yourself is to say no to something you don't want to do. You're allowed to do that.

All of us need a restorative counterbalance to the intensity of the work that we do. Decide that your self-care is a priority and then commit to making it happen in less-than-ideal circumstances. When you're restored and refreshed, it allows you to keep giving joyfully, responsibly, and sustainably. And that's a win-win for you and the animals you love!

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### About Jessica

Jessica Dolce is a dog walker, writer, and teacher living in Maine. She's the creator of Dogs in Need of Space and author of the popular blog 'Notes from a Dog Walker'. Jessica teaches classes on compassion fatigue and self-care for people who work with animals. Information on her classes can be found at [jessicadolce.com](http://jessicadolce.com).



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