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## Build a Self-Care Buffer Zone

By Michelle May, M.D.

In our diet and weight-obsessed culture, it is easy to forget that the real reason you eat is to fuel your life and provide you with the energy to do whatever you need and want to do. As you shift your focus away from food and weight, you free up your energy to build optimal health!

Optimal health is not the absence of disease. Your optimal well-being encompasses your physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual health—in other words, wellness of your body, mind, heart, and spirit that buffers you from inevitable stress. Optimal health doesn't require perfect health; it is simply an intention to practice self-care in your present situation.

So, what do you want to do? Where do you want to invest your energy? Here are some ideas for building an effective self-care buffer zone.

### Body: Physical Self-Care

- Schedule a check-up.
- Do something active to increase your flexibility, stamina, or strength.
- Take a hot bath or long shower to relax and unwind.
- Give yourself a manicure, pedicure, or facial.
- Treat yourself to a massage or a new hairstyle.
- Wear clothes that are attractive, comfortable, and fit your current size and shape.
- Clear clutter and create a pleasant space that helps you feel happy and calm.
- Plant a garden and grow fresh vegetables, herbs, or flowers.
- Spend time in nature walking, hiking, or sitting.

### Mind: Intellectual Self-Care

- Challenge yourself to think positively and powerfully.
- Set inspiring goals to give your brain a map to follow.
- Learn a new skill or language.
- Do brainteasers and play challenging games.
- Be creative; experiment with art, crafts, and hobbies.
- Listen to music, sing, or play an instrument.
- Take classes online or at your local community center or college.
- Participate in stimulating discussion or book groups.
- Travel or explore areas close to home like museums and historical sites.

### Heart: Emotional Self-Care

- Accept yourself as you are right now.
- Embrace your full spectrum of emotions for the depth and richness they bring.
- Spend quality time with your family and friends.
- Schedule a date night to build intimacy with your partner.
- Identify your feelings by writing in a journal or talking with a trusted friend or counselor.
- Set appropriate boundaries for healthier relationships.
- Assert yourself to let others know how you feel, what you think, and what you need. Accept that beyond that, you can't control what others think, feel, or do.
- While it's not possible or even desirable to eliminate stress, learn to manage it.

- Practice forgiveness. Harboring anger and hurt is harmful and eats up precious emotional energy.
- Be vulnerable. This deepens intimacy and frees you from the need to be perfect.
- Seek coaching, counseling, or therapy if needed for emotional support and to build coping skills.

### Spirit: Spiritual Self-Care

- Practice mindfulness. Be fully present in whatever you're doing—eating, talking, working, playing—to experience pleasure and meaning.
- Renew and restore yourself through prayer and meditation.
- Schedule time for your inner work. Know yourself, your values, and your purpose.
- See your problems as opportunities for learning and growth.
- Reclaim peace and joy, even as you face challenges.
- Look for the good in others; it's there somewhere, just waiting to be nurtured.
- Volunteer and give back to your community by helping others.
- Write down all you are grateful for.
- Practice kindness without expectation of receiving something in return.

Remember, the purpose of eating is to fuel your healthy, balanced, fulfilling life. How will you create a self-care buffer zone for yourself?

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From *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat*. Download chapter one at <http://amihungry.com/chapter1>.