

Love You!: Don't let low funds keep you from taking care of yourself



We know the message from the flight attendants: Place the oxygen mask on yourself first. It seems like an obvious warning and yet, even in the face of a spiraling airplane, many of us need to be reminded to take care of ourselves. It would actually be inspiring if the consequences to ignoring self-care weren't quite as dire.

Weekend getaways, cruises and spa sessions may not be in your budget. Luckily, there are still plenty of ways you can decompress and love thyself affordably in a way that works for your schedule.

Take a Tropical Vacation for \$5

A co-worker tipped me off to the "warmest place in Providence" and it's been a winter staple of mine ever since. When you need to either trick yourself into believing its summer or make yourself feel better about not being able to afford an island getaway, plan a visit to the Botanical Center at Roger Williams Park. The center touts itself as the largest indoor garden display in New England and, even in drearier months, you'll find bursts of reds and oranges peeking out amongst towering papaya trees and koi fish ponds. It's a mega mood boost and family friendly. Children under 6 get in free.

Choose Your Media Wisely

When you're overtaxed, there's a lot to be said for prioritizing couch time and binge watching - especially if you feel guilty about setting aside time to essentially lay inert and covered in blankets. (In my mind, there are always blankets involved in self soothing. There's also tea.) But are you making the best decisions in what you're watching to blow off steam? As tempting as it can be to jump into "The Ted Bundy Tapes," it's worth considering how emotionally "challenging" you want all your content to be. Shows like "The Great British Bake-Off" and "Queer Eye" are both great choices for comfort viewing in part because they're filled with people that you'd be thrilled to sit next to on an airplane. The catastrophes are manageable (pastry disasters!) and reminders that people are basically good. However, if you need something more stimulating to hold your attention, you could always eschew the civilized for the stupid and simple. Once, in the throes of a particularly difficult holiday season, my friend Shannon suggested I partake in a Paul Walkerbout. I watched every single *Fast and the Furious* movie, every night, until I felt better. They were mindless. They were high octane. A car raced a submarine. I didn't think of my problems once.

Give Yourself a Massage

This can be as involved or minimalist as you'd like. There are plenty of tools you can buy (or find at your gym) that you can use for self-massage. If you're looking for a full body release, foam rollers are a solid investment and can be found in the \$15 to \$30 range, on the lower end. If you roll, you know what a game changer this is. If you're new to rolling, once you get over the initial silliness of grinding your body back and forth over what looks like a giant pool noodle, you'll be hooked. If you don't have the time to roll around on your floor every night, try putting a tennis ball under your feet at the beginning of the day or giving yourself a little foot massage with lavender-infused lotion before you go to bed.

Look at the Big Picture

Join the scores before you and look to the cosmos for inspiration and perspective. On every clear Tuesday night, the Ladd Observatory in Providence opens free to the public. Getting out of your head and into the stars is humbling - and a way to feel like you're having a mini-adventure on an otherwise mundane week night. The best part of this rec? You can take this advice and apply it literally any time you step outside, no observatory needed. Whether you're walking the dog or walking into a bank, look up. Count to 30. Take a deep breath. It's all okay.

There's an App for That

Look, this act of self-love is a little tricky mainly because it involves picking up your phone - which can quickly lead into an anxiety freefall. (Work e-mails! You gotta respond! Ex-lovers! They're posting pictures!) But when we use our phones for the powers of good, it's like having an efficient little doctor in our pockets. Apps like Calm offer both freemium and premium versions to help practice mindfulness. Users can target their health goals upon download and choose from categories ranging from "improving focus" to "practicing gratitude" and more goals that will leave you wondering why you've asked your phone to order pizza - but never thought to outright ask it to "increase happiness." (You can ask Calm to do that!) The free version of the app gives you 12-minute daily meditations plus a nightly "Sleep Story" to help lull you to dreamland.

However, if getting a better night's sleep is one of your resolutions for 2019, I recommend My Sleep Button. The free app works by saying random words in 7-second intervals, with the intent being to focus and visualize each word for the duration. It's less tedious than counting sheep and, supposedly, causes the brain to shift gears in a pattern similar to how we dream. It may seem ... unusual ... at first to fall asleep while a disembodied woman whispers "*a wrench*" into your darkened room, but it's the most effective app I've found. Sweet dreams!