WLG 478

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

Taking Care of Your Spirit

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Educational Objectives

1. Define spirit.
2. Learn tips and activities to take care of your spirit.
3. Learn ways to use relaxation, meditation, yoga, and other practices.

What is spirit?

Most of us understand what it means to eat your vegetables, sleep 8 hours a night, and exercise 30 minutes a day in order to take care of our bodies, but many don't know what it means to take care of our spirit. In this fast-paced world full of multitasking, we often forget to take care of our inner self, or our spirit. We struggle to find time to concentrate on ourselves and relax our mind and body.

Taking care of your spirit means different things to different people. It may mean organized religion, rituals, or connecting to a higher power. It could also mean connecting with others, being a part of something, a hobby, or acts of kindness. For some it may mean being one with nature, expression of self in art, dance, yoga, or stress-management and relaxation practices.

Whatever techniques you choose, the focus is on your inner self or spirit. When taking care of your spirit, you will find more meaning and purpose in life – a centering or strength in your body. You may also have benefits, such as a better mood, less anxiety, and less depressive or negative thoughts.

There is no right or wrong way to care for your spirit. The only rule is for you to notice what moves you in positive ways, and then seek more of it. It can take as little as 5 to 10 minutes a day to nourish your spirit; however, 30 to 45 minutes a day will do your spirit good!

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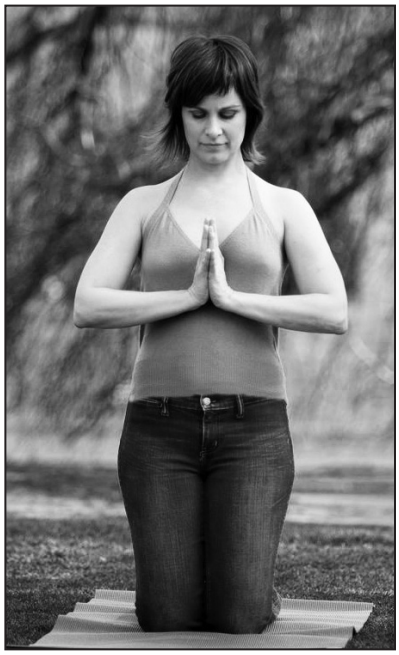
Here are a few tips to get you started

1. **Connect with people.** Attend the church of your choice, join a civic group, go out with friends, or share your thoughts and feelings with others who support you. Feeling like you are part of something helps to build up your inner spirit.

2. **Volunteer.** Give time to an organization or do something for someone else. Pay it forward with random acts of kindness. When you are doing something for someone else, it enriches your spirit.
3. **Express yourself.** Journal your thoughts and feelings each day. Record what has happened and how you feel about it. Express your feelings in art, singing, dancing, or writing. When you are able to release your feelings, your spirit is able to move forward.
4. **Focus on positive things.** Write down two positive things that happened that day, count your blessings, and read positive stories. If something in your day makes you nervous, anxious, or depressed, and you can avoid it for a few days, try to (e.g. watching the news or reading the paper).
5. **Find sunshine.** Sunlight allows vitamin D to be absorbed by your body. Being outside in fresh air has many benefits, as well. Taking a walk outside when the weather is good allows you to connect with nature, clear your mind, and gives you the opportunity to see the beauty in the world. Don't take this time to dwell on the negative. Instead, view the world through the eyes of a child and find glory in the splendor of it all.
6. **Live a healthy lifestyle.**
   - Eating healthy (5 servings of vegetables a day, 3 servings of fruit, 3 servings of low-fat dairy, lean protein, and whole grains) gives your body the nutrition it needs to be strong, feel good, and have energy.
   - Exercising for 30 minutes at least five times a week gets your blood pumping and releases endorphins that make you feel better and have more energy. Physical activity gives you confidence and helps your spirit feel strong.
   - Sleep 6 to 8 hours a night. Both your physical body and your inner spirit need rest. Only when we get 6 to 8 hours of sleep do we truly rest our mind and our spirit. If you have trouble sleeping because your mind is racing, journal before you go to sleep. Practice deep breathing to relax your mind, and then begin to count your blessings.
7. **Try unplugging for 15 to 30 minutes a day by turning off all electronics.** Your inner spirit needs moments of silence. When taking care of your spirit, you must have time to reflect on events and process feelings about these events. With televisions, music playing, the phone ringing, and texting, it is impossible to tune out the outside world and reflect on your inner self. Take at least 15 minutes each day to be in silence and listen to your own thoughts and feelings.

8. **Reduce stress.** As the saying goes, "don't sweat the small stuff . . . and it's all small stuff." If there is something stressful going on in your life, focus on what you can control. If there is something that is stressing you that is not under your control, stressing about it is wasted energy. Sometimes you have to just let it go, move on, or accept things the way that they are. Stressing or worrying about things will rob you of the joy of the moment.

Taking care of your spirit with relaxation and meditation



Relaxation and meditation strategies can bring wonderful positive changes to your body, metabolism, heart, and spirit. These techniques take just minutes to practice and have been shown to improve overall health and quality of life.

According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine *(http://nccam.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm)*, relaxation is more than a state of mind; it physically changes the way your body functions. When your body is relaxed, breathing slows, blood pressure and oxygen consumption decrease, and some people report an increased sense of well-being. This is called the "relaxation response." Being able to produce the relaxation response using relaxation techniques may counteract the effects of long-term stress, which may contribute to or worsen a range of health problems including depression, digestive disorders, headaches, high blood pressure, and insomnia.

- Regular practice of meditation can improve memory and the ability to concentrate.
- Relaxation and meditation can increase positive moods and decrease distractive thoughts.
- Most relaxation techniques can be self-taught and are easy to add to your daily routine.
- Techniques include:
  - Deep breathing – in through your nose, filling your stomach with air. Hold it 3 seconds and breathe out through your mouth.
  - Maintain focus – think about your breath. Just be present in the moment.
  - Find a "happy place" in your mind – close your eyes and try to picture your favorite place. See the colors, hear the sounds, and picture yourself being there.
  - Count to ten – simply taking a few seconds to stop and count can keep you from reacting to something without thinking first.
  - Yoga is about controlled breathing, stretching at your own pace, concentration, and connecting your mind and body. When taking a yoga class, you will move at your own pace and set your own limits. It is an hour of connecting your thoughts with your breath and focusing on your inner strength.

Life is a journey and how you navigate it is totally under your control. There will be speed bumps along the way, but as with any speed bump, you slow down until you make it across.

Then, you resume your path, maintaining your pace along this highway called life. You can be stressed, worried, unfulfilled, and unhappy, or you can choose to do something different. You have a choice as to how your journey unfolds. Choose to be in peace with a calm soul and a harmonious spirit.

Tips for leaders

- Invite a counselor, yoga instructor, or Extension agent to your meeting to do the exercises with the group.
- Watch the YouTube videos before the session, so you are familiar with the exercises.
- Have a computer with Internet access at the meeting, so the members can watch the YouTube videos.

Ready to try it?

Make a plan to care for your spirit. Write down three things you will do to care for your spirit. This list is a contract with yourself to be better to yourself. You deserve it!

My plan to take care of my spirit:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Websites to get you started

Short guided relaxation exercises:
http://youtu.be/-j5Z4E2wkh4

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: Mindfulness Meditations
http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22

Yoga for beginners:
http://www.fitnessmagazine.com/workout/yoga/poses/beginner-yoga-poses/

Yoga for seniors:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfwsGu6seCA

References

"The Manual" Taking Care of Your Spirit: By Shannon Cutts *http://blogs.psychcentral.com/mentoring-recovery/2011/12/the-manual-taking-care-of-your-spirit/*

11 Ways To Take Care of Your Spirit *www.simplecareerlife.com*

Spring Cleaning for the Soul: 25 Ways to Nourish Your Spirit *http://alisonimiller.com*

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine *http://nccam.nih.gov/health/stress/relaxation.htm*

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center *http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22*

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