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West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

Taking Care of Your Spirit

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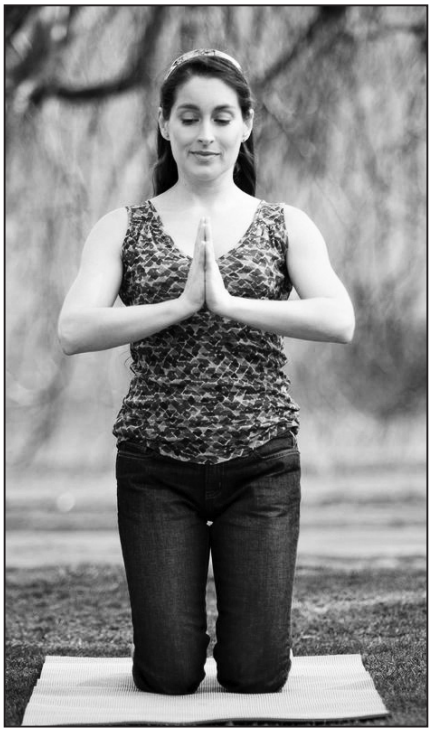
There is no right or wrong way to care for your spirit. The only rule is for you to notice what moves you in positive ways, and then seek more of it.

What is spirit?



Most of us understand what it means to take care of ourselves – eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep – 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, or acts of kindness. For some it may mean being one with nature, expression of one's 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!

Here are a few tips to get you started

1. **Connect with people.** Feeling like you are part of something helps to build up your inner spirit.

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2. **Volunteer.** When you are doing something for someone else, it enriches your spirit.
3. **Express yourself.** Express your feelings in journaling, art, singing, dancing, or writing.
4. **Focus on positive things.** Write down two positive things that happened that day.
5. **Find sunshine.** Sunlight allows vitamin D to be absorbed by your body. Being outside in fresh air has many benefits, as well.
6. **Live a healthy lifestyle.** Eat healthy, exercise 30 minutes five times a week, and get 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night.
7. **Try unplugging for 15 to 30 minutes a day** by turning off all electronics. Your inner spirit needs moments of silence.
8. **Reduce stress.** "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 it is not under your control, stressing about it is wasted energy.

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, 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 people report an increased sense of well-being called the "relaxation response." The relaxation response may counteract the effects of long-term stress, which may contribute to a range of health problems including depression, digestive disorders, headaches, high blood pressure, and insomnia.

- Take a deep breath, in through the nose, out through the mouth. Hold it for 3 seconds.
- Focus on the present.
- Find a "happy place."
- Count to ten before reacting.
- Try yoga or meditation.

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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