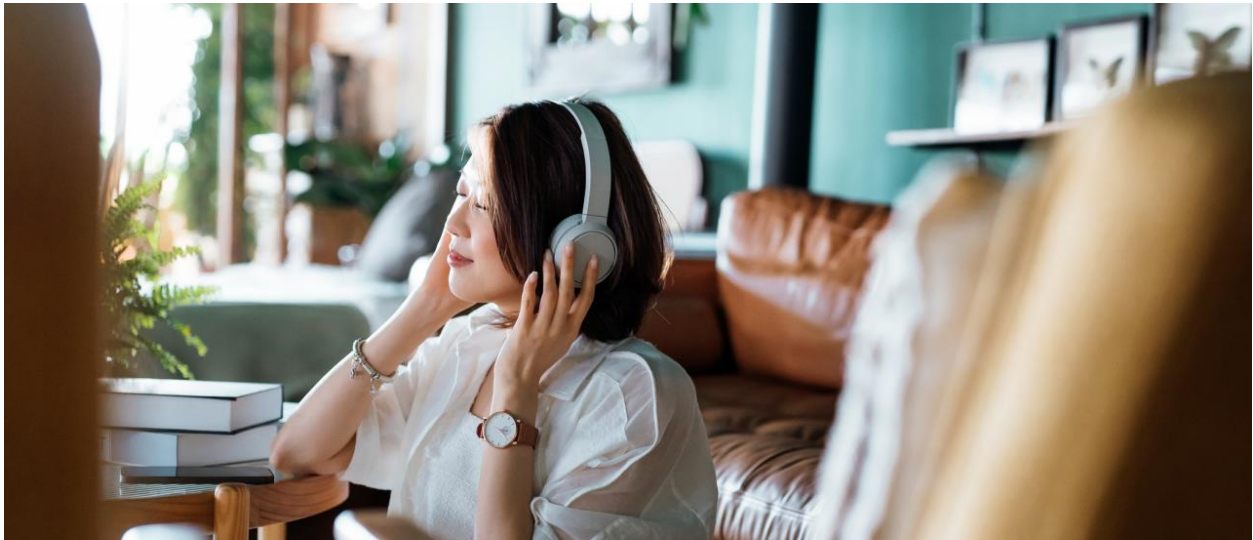


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# Burnout Won't Prevent Itself



By [Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries](#) , INSEAD

**While people make sure to charge their phones, they don't always take the time to recharge themselves.**

Everyone in the office wondered what had happened to Caroline. Word was going around that she had been hospitalised due to work-related stress. But how could this be? Caroline had always shown so much pleasure in her work.

True enough, Caroline had always put an enormous amount of energy in her professional life. She never failed to volunteer whenever extra tasks needed to be done. She was the ultimate, cheerful team player.

While Caroline heroically catered to the needs of others, it wasn't so clear whether she was good at taking care of herself. Self-care didn't seem to be her thing. But what is this self-care all about? It isn't just about finding ways to relax. Rather, it is about making a conscious decision to prioritise your physical, social and emotional welfare.

Self-care can make you resilient against the life stressors that you can't eliminate. It has important health benefits, such as improving energy and reducing anxiety and depression. Furthermore, it can strengthen your interpersonal relationships and increase your happiness levels.

Unfortunately, too many people view self-care as a luxury rather than a priority. They're left feeling overwhelmed and too tired to handle life's challenges. And then, like in Caroline's story, the elastic band just snaps.

## **Self-care is far from selfish**

When you take steps to care for your mind and body, you're better equipped to live your best life. Self-care doesn't mean 'me first'; it means 'me too'. It is a form of self-preservation, not a free pass to go into narcissistic overdrive.

Hence, while it is very laudable to help others, you should make yourself a priority. Who else will? In fact, taking care of yourself is the best way to ensure you remain capable of taking care of others.

How best to go about it? With self-care, there are no quick fixes. If you put off taking a break and changing direction until you're ill, it may be too late. Self-care must be incorporated into your daily routine.

First, you must assess your own needs and figure out what areas of your life need attention. There is no one-size-fits-all plan of action. The following checklist may help you get a head start when it comes to your physical, social and mental self-care.

### **Physical self-care**

- Are you getting the sleep you need? You need to know how and when to rest.
- Are you eating well? Your diet should provide you with the energy you need to function well.
- Are you having regular physical examinations?
- Are you exercising regularly to keep in shape?

Those who think they have no time to take care of their physical health sooner or later will need to find time for illness.

### **Social self-care**

Having a sense of belonging is imperative for well-being. *Homo sapiens* are wired for connection. Naturally, social needs will vary for each of us. It is up to you to figure out what your social needs are. Sometimes, all you need is to call a friend, send a note to an acquaintance, wave at a neighbour or even smile at a stranger.

- Do you make time for friends and family?
- Do you generally spend your energy on things you care about?
- Have you learnt how to say no and set boundaries?
- Can you carve out 'me' time when you need it?

Always remember that your time and energy are precious. And you should be able to choose how you use both. There is only so much you can do, so choose well.

## **Mental self-care**

- Do you regularly engage in intellectual pursuits that fuel your mind?
- Do you pay attention to your spiritual needs?
- Are you clear on the activities that give you energy or that help you relax? Do you take the time to do them?
- Do you sometimes take stock of your personal life and career?

Self-care of the mental kind could also mean taking a walk in the park to enjoy nature after a day's work, listening to a beautiful piece of music, reading your favourite book or visiting a museum.

In fact, these small breaks can take many other forms, like talking to a friend, getting something nice to drink or to eat, sending a text or photograph to someone close, or even looking at photographs of the places you've visited.

Never equate these breaks with idleness. Looking at the sky, stretching out on the grass, listening to the murmur of a river, or watching birds fly by is never a waste of time. While your mind is seemingly doing nothing, you are in fact recharging yourself.

## **An inner job**

When you take good care of yourself, it's easier to be compassionate toward others. You're more likely to be able to put yourself in other people's shoes and understand their needs.

Self-care, ultimately, helps you live a fuller life. If you want to influence the world around you, even in minor ways, the real work begins inside. Only then can it radiate outwards.

As the Buddha said, "You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."

## Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/career/burnout-wont-prevent-itself>

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## About the author(s)

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