

## **Taking Care of Number One**

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You are strapped into your airplane seat with your young son or daughter beside. You are listening to the flight attendant describe the safety features of the airplane on which you are flying, and she tells you that in the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will come down from the ceiling overhead. You are instructed to place a mask over your own nose and mouth first and then over your child's. You think to yourself, "That's crazy!" I need to take care of my child first and then myself.

This story is a metaphor for the way many of us see our daily lives. In our fast-paced society, we often put the needs of others before our own needs and often it feels that we have no choice. There are demands of children, spouse, parents, friends, and bosses all competing for our limited time. However, taking care of yourself must be a top priority if you are to continue to be able to be productive and fulfill all of the roles daily life demands. If you do not care for yourself, no one else can or will do it for you.

So, given the hectic schedules that we all seem to face, what can you do to care for yourself? First, you should eat nutritious meals whenever you can. Of course, the fast food burger is a necessity occasionally, but if at all possible, meals should be healthful and should never be skipped. Second, you should set aside time at least three days each week to exercise. You can walk, jog, bike, take an aerobics class, or do anything else that gets you blood pumping and your body moving. Exercise is critical to a healthy body and a clearer head. You will find your mood is elevated, your patience is improved, and you feel more energetic if you eat well and exercise regularly. Equally important is nourishing your mind. Set aside time to learn new things, enjoy a hobby and spend time with friends and family.

These may seem like simple ideas, but they can be difficult to implement. Next time you find yourself considering the needs of others and neglecting your own, try to think of yourself as a separate person and ask what he/she needs. Then work to figure out a way to address those needs within the time and energy constraints of your daily life.

At first, it may seem selfish to take care of yourself. In fact, we can usually come up with a million excuses for not taking care of ourselves. If you are kind to yourself, you will find that you are more productive in whatever you do. So put yourself first from time to time. You will find that you and those around you will reap the rewards.

**Are You Taking Care of #1?**  
**A True/False Quiz**

1. I frequently skip meals. True/False
2. I do not exercise regularly. True/False
3. I do not participate in a hobby or leisure activity regularly. True/False
4. I rarely get enough sleep and often feel tired all day. True/False
5. I do not spend much time with family and friends. True/False
6. I cannot remember the last time I took a class or learned something new.  
True/False
7. Doing something for myself can wait if someone else needs something.  
True/False
8. I feel that my “job” in life is to serve others. True/False

If you answered “True” to some or all of these statements, it is likely that you are not taking adequate care of yourself. You should reassess your priorities and move yourself higher on the list so that you can regain a healthier balance between doing for others and caring for yourself.