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53 Self-Nurturing Tips

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by Jean Zartner

1. Even if you've never been married, sign up for a class on grief or divorce recovery. It'll help you understand the rebuilding process. The next time you feel you've lost something (a person, an opportunity, a dream) you can handle the experience better.
2. Start a folder labeled "Warm Fuzzies," "Positive Strokes," or something like that. In it, keep a record of your accomplishments and the kudos other people give you. This is especially useful at work, where you can use it as fuel to light up your next performance review. Any day you're feeling down or less than confident, you can look at this folder and smile.
3. Take a class about writing humor or doing stand-up or improvisational comedy – but don't give up your day job just yet. Even if you don't feel you're talented, think of the fun people you'll meet and the laughs you'll have!
4. Start a "humor refrigerator." Write down or cut out humorous tidbits, including *Reader's Digest* anecdotes, e-mails, funny puns, bumper stickers, personal license plates, ads, and jokes on the radio. Periodically move them to a folder to make room for new ones. By always keeping a new supply of funny gems in plain sight, they can cheer you up more often. If it doesn't work, you can always open a magnet store.
5. Plan a reunion with long-time friends. Meet at a place that would appeal to all of you. That way, people may be more likely to show up, because it's more like a vacation than just a reunion. Plus, you can share a new adventure, instead of just reminiscing about the old times and the old stompin' grounds. That helps to reinforce the friendships and move them forward.
6. Rent a funny video. Keep a piece of paper in your wallet or purse to list comedies people recommend. That way, the next time you go to a video store – you're set. Even if someone recommends a current movie, it won't be long before it's in the video stores. Many libraries loan videos, too.

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| <p>7. Volunteer to hold babies at a hospital nursery. Babies are basic. They haven't accumulated a lot of garbage like our contemporaries have (unless of course you count the hazardous waste when changing diapers). When a baby smiles or laughs, it's hard for your heart not to melt. Awwww.</p> |
| <p>8. Visit friends who have pets you can ...well, pet. That way, you get to feel silky fur and hear soothing purrs - without the vet bills and achy back (from lugging big bags of dog food or litter). Upon first meeting a friend's pet, try lying face down on the floor and waiting patiently with your hand outstretched. Usually Fido or Fluffy will decide to come have a sniff.</p> |
| <p>9. Learn and practice yoga, especially compression poses. For example, curl up in a ball and pretend you're being squozen like an orange. (Is that the right verb? Squeeze, squoze, squozen?) Anyway, compression poses are like giving your whole body a hug. Yoga is for your mind, body, and spirit. It helps you deal better with everyday stress, breathe more deeply, and even makes you more patient.</p> |
| <p>10. Feel the mountain air against your skin. If there isn't a mountain handy, open the car window and let the air tickle your arm hairs as you drive. Noticing little sensations like that can be calming. We so often become out of touch with our bodies because we're so much into our heads. Focusing on body sensations takes us back to the basics and helps us slow down.</p> |
| <p>11. Wear fabrics like velvet, silk, and cashmere. If your wardrobe consists more of textures like polyester or denim, go to stores with luxurious fabrics or clothes and browse (with your hands). Enjoy how the various textures feel. Pet the plush animals in stores, too. Shopping can be a lot more fun and satisfying if you consciously make it a sensory experience.</p> |
| <p>12. Get a massage. To save money, make an appointment with a student at a massage school, or find a massage therapist who's just starting out. This costs less, so you can do it more often. Or, try some of the self-massage devices sold at health food stores. Wooden rollers, massage balls, and battery-operated massagers won't feel as good as a professional massage – but you can use them whenever you want. Find one you can keep at the office, too.</p> |
| <p>13. If you're not meeting your daily hug quota, mentally turn compliments into hugs. For instance, if a friend writes and says, "I miss you," imagine her giving you hugs – even if she's miles away. Or if a co-worker says, "Nice presentation," take it as a hug, even if actual hugs simply aren't done in your office.</p> |

14. Gently work your way up to having more physical contact with friends: give a high five, pat a shoulder, squeeze a hand. You'll be able to tell which people are ok with it, because they'll start to reciprocate.

15. Baby yourself: a soft blanket, the motion of a rocking chair, a stuffed animal. Make faces at yourself in a mirror. Giggle. Wiggle your toes. Smile at strangers. Bawl lustily. If you feel the need for a pacifier, drink from a sports water bottle.

16. Buy a mixed bouquet of flowers and frequently turn the vase to admire the arrangement from different angles. Feel the different flowers and leaves to enjoy their textures. Did you know that if you mix lemon-lime soda with the water in the vase, the flowers last longer?

17. Enrich your environment, even if you're not financially rich. Rearrange the accessories in your home to get a fresh look, without any expense – and minimal effort. You'll be surprised how often you think, "Why didn't I put that there before? That looks great!" Display scarves, blankets, tall grasses, and feathers to soften and texturize an otherwise hard world.

18. Practice, practice (and then practice some more) the art of graciously accepting a compliment. Just smile and say, "thank you." Never discount the compliment (as in, "What, this old thing?"). That person just gave you a gift! Don't offend her by implying she doesn't know what she's talking about.

19. Go for a walk by yourself – without headphones. Notice how your sensory awareness sharpens. Sniff the air. Crouch down and study tiny flowers. Listen to the birds and animals. Find out if a pretty rock is hot or cold to the touch. Imagine how long that rock has been there, and what it has "seen." After the walk, review the things you smelled, saw, heard, touched, and felt. It makes walking a lot more fun.

20. If you're feeling afraid of change, think of the good things in your life, which haven't always been there. Maybe you have a favorite coffee shop, which was built after you moved to the neighborhood. How about some of your new friends? Something had to change for them to come into your life, right? Keep those good changes in mind as new changes happen.

21. Change the radio station when a negative song comes on, firmly stating, "No sad songs are allowed!" Or make up your own lyrics and sing along, drowning out the ones that bring you down. Listen to a classical station. Listen to a Spanish music station (if you don't speak Spanish), so even if the lyrics are sad, you won't know what they're saying. Keep a favorite tape or CD in the car in case you can't find anything good on the radio. Sometimes, just listen to the scenery.

22. Start a journal. One school of thought recommends you buy fancy writing utensils and artistically bound books with blank pages. Then there are those who favor whatever pen or crayon is handy on sticky notes, envelopes, and paper napkins. There's also a middle school of thought, where you use common, utilitarian, office-style pens and notepads. Take your pick. Don't feel guilty if you don't write daily, or even grammatically. Just write!

23. Practice the art of re-focusing. If you notice something that brings you down, look around to find anything – no matter what – that appeals to you. For instance, if an ugly, dirty, run-down building seems depressing, look for a pretty flowerpot, an interesting arrangement of bricks in a wall, or a lovely cloud formation. Hold your fingers up, as if composing a picture within a frame, blocking out the ugly and re-focusing on the beautiful.

24. Cultivate that little thrill that can come when you see someone do something nice. Not just when you hear about a filthy rich philanthropist funding a hospital, but even when you see someone walking to a trash bin instead of throwing their litter on the sidewalk. Wave and smile to another driver who lets you in front of them when you're changing lanes. If you're on foot, crossing a parking lot, acknowledge a driver who leaves you the time and space to cross.

25. Figure out your personal mission in life. This is different from a goal or dream. It's about how you live your life every day. This makes decisions much easier to make. You just do the things that are in line with your mission. Take a miss on anything that hinders you from your mission. For instance, a mission could be, "I am a catalyst for joy." In that case, avoid doing anything in a way that doesn't promote (directly or indirectly) joy for you or someone else.

26. Say "No" to an invitation that you know would not be in your best interest. Do this especially if it's from a person who does not have the attributes you value. Life's too short. There are plenty of worthwhile things you can do with people that are worth your while.

27. Sign up for a class to improve self-esteem. These often come under obvious titles such as Assertiveness Training and Confidence Building. Check for adult education courses through community colleges, churches, and other institutions. Look into Toastmasters or Dale Carnegie. Acting, dance, and public speaking classes are great for building self-esteem, plus you meet such interesting people!

28. If your company culture allows it, decorate your office to be more home-like. Put a nice, colored fabric over the blah, brown cork on your bulletin board; cover your light switch plate and tissue box with the same fabric. Add some whimsy – as well as more texture and softness – with plush, stuffed animals. You’ll probably give your co-workers a lift whenever they come to your office, too.

29. Join a journaling group or class. Or get a book on it. You’ll be surprised at the fun techniques that can inspire you to write with purpose. You’ll find themes and starting-off points to make your journaling more fun and productive.

30. Cheer yourself by going to a comforting café or upbeat comedy club. Disclaimer: At some cafés, the humor may be better than the food; at some comedy clubs, the food may be better than the humor. But check it out. You won’t know unless you try.

31. Lighting can really affect your mood. If possible, turn off harsh fluorescent lights and buy a beautiful, antique-looking lamp. A stained-glass lamp gives off a colorful glow. If you set the lamp up high, you’ll still get enough light for your work. If you have a room with no windows, try putting up an old window frame. Fill it with a stained-glass window that has a nature motif. Then backlight it to simulate the sun shining in.

32. There’s a wonderfully fun form of exercise, which combines World Beat music, yoga, martial arts, and improvisational dance. It’s called NIA (Neuro-muscular Integrative Activity). See if any of your local rec centers, gyms, or dance studios offer classes yet. It’s imaginative, adaptable to any level of experience and fitness, and downright joyful.

33. When you’re planning a trip, write or type a packing list. Save these lists to help you remember what to take on the next trip. This means less time and less worry about forgetting something. But the lists are also surprisingly fun for reminiscing. They remind you what you were wearing and what activities you were focusing on for each trip.

34. Are you interested in dancing, but not sure you want to get into couples-style dancing? Try Contra Dancing or Country-Western line dancing. Neither requires a regular partner. The music is upbeat, and the people are fun. Check the entertainment section of your newspaper (the Friday edition is usually the best bet) and look under Dance.

35. Do you like Ballroom Dancing, but don't go because you don't have a partner? See if your city has a USABDA (U.S. Amateur Ballroom Dance Association) chapter, and if their dances have dance hosts. These are men who are good dancers and are there to dance with unescorted ladies. Also, some dance studios (usually the independents, not the franchisees) have open, social dances. Check your newspaper's Entertainment section newspaper or the Yellow Pages.

36. Try out a Fit Ball (also called a Medicine Ball). They're available through gyms and some chiropractors. Sit and bounce on one for energizing fun that also loosens your spine. Stretch out and relax your back and neck by lying on one. You can even sit on one to help loosen up your hips. They even come in different colors, so you can match your décor!

37. Write down things that you want to do with your life before your next birthday. Have a friend send the list to you just before your birthday and see how you're doing.

38. What traits do you value in a friend? Who do you know with those traits? Contact them. Friendship is often a matter of follow-up and persistence. Don't give up until they've turned down two or three invitations. If that ever happens, move on to someone else. And just know that something better must be waiting for you.

39. Send an e-mail to a friend or two just to say you've been thinking about them and wondering how they're doing. Or send post cards, even if you're not on vacation. Find pretty or funny post cards of your town. Or design your own cards on heavy stock. Create them by pasting photos, using rubber stamps or stickers, or doing calligraphy. People enjoy getting personalized cards – and you'll give your creative spirit an outlet.

40. Try a new church. All those potential friends – just congregated there, waiting to meet you. Have a mental list of questions you want to ask to help start conversations. For instance: "Excuse me, I'm new here. Can you tell me...what's available for child care...what fellowship activities are there...do you have retreats...is there a group for singles...what classes are offered?" Of course, you can get a lot of that information from the church bulletin, but this way you'll meet more people.

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| <p>41. List people who make you feel better when you're down. Keep the list by the phone. You don't have to call anyone – just look at the list. Just knowing you know such nice people will make you feel better. If it's not a good time to call, start hatching plans for a get-together and call them later.</p> |
| <p>42. If you're afraid to go to a party because you're afraid no one will talk to you, remind yourself that if you stay home alone, no one will talk to you for sure! Go to the party with the intent of finding out as much as you can about people. Go with a mindset of, "I wonder what kind of interesting people I can meet? What do they do? Where have they lived and traveled? What are their aspirations?" People will find you fascinating if you just get them to talk about themselves.</p> |
| <p>43. Does it bother you when you have to eat alone at a restaurant? Go prepared – with a book to read, pen and paper for journaling, letters to write, or an interest in people watching. If you're traveling, ask your hotel manager or concierge to call ahead for your reservation – for a good table. The restaurant wants to stay on the good side of the hotel, so they'll probably comply.</p> |
| <p>44. If you're trying to become more independent about going places by yourself, start gently by going to a movie. You get to pick whichever one you want, and you'll always agree with your own opinion of it. People shouldn't be talking during a movie anyway, so even if someone were with you, you couldn't talk to her. If you still don't like going alone, invite people to join you until you find a movie-going buddy.</p> |
| <p>45. A mind trick: Think of the start of the day as an arbitrary point, which you can move back as needed. For instance, if your morning went badly, declare it to be part of the previous day and mentally start your day at whatever time it is now.</p> |
| <p>46. If you're smiling, you look younger. Not only is it a lot cheaper than a jowl lift, but an extra perk is that it perks up the people who see you wearing a glowing smile instead of a floppy ol' frown.</p> |
| <p>47. You'll feel more confident if you look more confident. If your head is jutting forward, giving you a slouched, sloppy look, try tucking your chin in closer to your chest. This brings your head back into better alignment over your shoulders. Also, bring your shoulders back so your shoulder blades move a little closer to each other. Now smile and make eye contact. <i>Voila!</i> Confidence.</p> |
| <p>48. Save copies of letters you send or e-mail to friends. Especially the ones where you pour your heart out. This can serve as a journal and has the added benefit that you can keep in touch with your friends at the same time you keep in touch with yourself.</p> |

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| <p>49. Travel. Even if it's just a road trip to a neighboring state. Being in a place where you don't know exactly what to expect around the next bend helps your mind to come alive to new ideas. Have a notepad or dictaphone handy so you can record your ideas to try out when you get back to the old homestead.</p> |
| <p>50. Keep an ear out for children's records. They often have more uplifting lyrics than adults' records, which are often mushy or depressing. For instance, "We All Stand Together" by Paul McCartney (friendship) and "It's Not Easy Being Green" by Kermit the Frog (self-acceptance).</p> |
| <p>51. Make a list of 25 things you like about yourself (10 is a less daunting number if this is the first time you've ever done this activity). If you have trouble, think of what other people have said about you. Also, think about the little common courtesies you perform, such as signaling a turn, holding a door for an older person, or even just using mouthwash. You may take these things for granted; though other people appreciate them!</p> |
| <p>52. Try not to put yourself down – even in your own mind. For example, if you can't find your keys, instead of "I can never find things" (which may become a self-fulfilling prophecy), say, "It's not like me to lose things." Instead of "I blew that," say, "Well, I learned a lesson from that. Next time I'll..." Instead of "I can't do math," say "I prefer working with words than numbers." Consider it as a "What's the Best Way to Re-Phrase This?" game.</p> |
| <p>53. Once in a while, there's nothing wrong with throwing yourself a pity party. The real pity would be if you didn't let yourself feel your feelings. Schedule time to have a good cry so you can get it out of your system. Follow it up with something fun and light-hearted, so you don't get stuck in wallowing.</p> |

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