



A Care Plan for Nursing Students...

10 Antidotes for Stress

by Donna Cardillo



We have all heard the preflight safety instructions advising that in the event of loss of cabin pressure, you should put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others. Why? Because if you become incapacitated, you will lose your ability to help others. I can't think of a more perfect analogy to underscore why nurses need to take care of themselves in order to be effective caregivers. And yet, we so often put our own needs on a back burner so we can attend to everyone and everything else in our lives. But by not having a clearly defined plan for self-care, we drain our vital resources and risk burnout.

This lesson is particularly important for nursing students because you are just getting started in the profession. Most of you are juggling school, work, home life, and many other personal responsibilities. Incorporating self-care into your career plan now will help you to get more out of your educational experience, have a better quality of life while attending school, and build a solid foundation for a long, happy, and successful career. With that in mind, following are ten care plan tips, *just for you...*



1. Tune out the noise.

We all have an inner voice that can keep us focused, if we only listened to it more. Often, it's hard to hear that voice amidst the din of everyday life. Unless you live in a vacuum, you are exposed to street noises, conversations, the buzz of the workplace or classroom, or the constant drone of the TV or radio. While it is challenging to find quiet time, these moments allow us to reflect on our lives and tune into ourselves.

Where can you find this quiet? If your home is always noisy, try to designate a quiet room in your house just for you; or establish quiet hours with your family where no TV or radio is allowed. If all else fails, try getting up just a few minutes earlier or going to sleep a bit later and give yourself some "me time" before the rest of your family is up and about. Outside your home, you can find quiet at the library, a park, or a place of worship. A regular practice of sitting quietly, even for brief periods of time, helps to keep you calm and on track.



2. Commune with nature.

Go outdoors whenever you can. Go to the park, take a walk in your neighborhood, sit in your backyard, or go to the beach, woods, or mountains. Take a hike! Breathing fresh air, feeling the sun on your face, and listening to the sounds of nature will calm you. Also, the natural world keeps our lives in perspective by reminding us that there are forces greater than ourselves in the world. When you can't be outdoors, listen to nature sounds on tape or disc, either before bed or just to relax. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a forest or by the ocean. You'll be amazed at how peaceful you'll feel.

3. Don't be all things to all people.

Don't overextend yourself. You're only human, and there's just so much you can do in a day. Are there tasks you are doing that you can delegate? Can friends, family members, or neighbors help? If they haven't offered, ask. Post a master calendar of chores and activities in your kitchen and make sure all family members take turns. Your family wants you to succeed and will be there for you, but you have to let them know you need them. Being all things to all people won't get you any medals, it will only exhaust you.

4. Practice relaxation techniques.

You don't need to sit in the lotus position for hours or burn incense to benefit from meditation or deep breathing. Sit comfortably and focus on an inanimate object as you breathe deeply, or try counting slowly from 1-50. Some people have a mantra, or favorite word they repeat to themselves to calm them down. Try practicing yoga, which combines breathing and meditation techniques along with stress-relieving postures. All these approaches will help you stay focused and calm, lower your heart rate, and can bring you to a place of clarity and inner peace. Ideally, you would want to meditate in a peaceful spot where you will not be interrupted or distracted. You can also meditate on the bus, subway, or standing on line! Relaxation exercises can be practiced virtually anytime and anywhere. Just close your eyes and tune everything out. Even five to ten minutes of relaxation practice helps.



5. Have some fun.

Sometimes, the only way to take a break from the daily grind is to change your routine and try something different, whether it's exploring a new hobby, trying out a recipe, checking out a movie or book, or just getting together with an old friend. Sometimes, a change of scenery can help. If you've been inside studying for hours, get out and take a walk. Changing your routine will recharge your batteries, just as



all work and no play will wreak havoc with your body, mind, and spirit.

6. Pamper yourself.

A little pampering goes a long way, so treat yourself to a massage, facial or pedicure, and don't wait for a special occasion. Getting that last paper done or doing your best on an exam are great reasons to give yourself a spa treat, and both men and women can enjoy them.

7. Don't worry...stay healthy.

Staying healthy when you are running around juggling a



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million tasks can be your greatest challenge, but if you focus on eating well, getting the sleep you need, and going for annual checkups, you'll be ahead of the game.

Nursing students typically eat on the run, grabbing fast food when they can. Poor eating habits stress the body, impair memory and cognitive function, and rob you of energy. They can also cause unhealthy weight gain or loss. A healthy breakfast is key to starting the day right. Skip the fatty donut and go for cereal with fruit and skim milk instead. The Food Pyramid issued by the USDA is a useful guideline for healthy nutrition, and advises large portions of fruits and veggies, and minimal fats, oils, and sweets. (See Resources.)

Try to exercise regularly, even if you can only manage 20 minutes three times a week. Exercise releases endorphins, reduces stress, and increases blood flow to your brain. Sleep deprivation dulls the senses, weakens your immunity, and alters your mood. Try to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep a night.

9. Build support systems.

Friendships, professional affiliations, and other support systems help relieve stress and anxiety and provide us with a sense of community. Develop friendship with your fellow students and faculty — you are sharing a unique experience and will always have a special bond between you.

10. Stay organized!

Nothing causes stress faster than missing a deadline or exam,

forgetting an appointment, or pleading with your teacher for an extension on that paper. Not to mention trying to make dinner with no food in the house or getting dressed with no clean clothes. Buy a day planner, and mark in it all the deadlines and important dates you know of. Carry it with you at all times. Checking off your to-do items and crossing off that list of projects one at a time will give you a great sense of control over your life. If you are overwhelmed by errands, try setting aside the same time each week for each task and stick to it. And by all means, studying comes first. Mark your study time in your day planner so it is an appointment with yourself you keep each day. ☺

resources

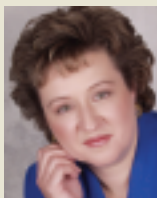
Food Guide Pyramid

www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/food/food-pyramid/main.htm

suggested reading

The Body Clock Guide to Better Health.
Smolensky, M. and Lamberg, L. Henry Holt & Co., New York, NY, 2001.

Meditation for Dummies.
Bodian, S. Wiley & Sons, Indianapolis, IN, 1999.



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