

TEVET

Stress...Challenging Yourself to Practice Self-Care

by Iris Stendig-Raskin, MSN, CRNP, WHNP-BC

“Stressed souls need the reassuring rhythm of self-nurturing rituals.”

Sarah Ban Breathnach

At Rosh Chodesh Tevet, we have just celebrated Thanksgiving and the miracle of Chanukkah. Right around the corner are the secular celebrations of Christmas and New Year's, and while we might not celebrate all of these events, the added hustle and bustle of the external environment, coupled with the demands within our own lives, can exacerbate our stress.

During the course of each day, most of us wear multiple hats. Our plates, once balanced, are now over-filled and have become veritable platters with all the 'shoulds' that we carry. It is no wonder that most of our stress is carried in our back and shoulders (note that the first six letters spell *should*). Those burdens that weigh us down contribute to our stress and discomfort.



The term *stress*, as we understand it, was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.” (<http://www.stress.org/what-is-stress/#sthash.DPKFZl hZ.dpuf>)

Good stresses are those experiences that inspire and motivate us to rise to a challenge, making us realize our potential. Experiencing good stress makes us stronger and more confident in our abilities to take on whatever hardships life brings to us.

Bad stress lasts too long and happens too often. This is the type of stress that is harmful to our health, and doesn't allow us to achieve goals and finish tasks. It can also leave us immobilized and make it difficult to move forward. It can affect our ability to function on a daily basis, and can leave us depleted, tired and anxious. Negative stress takes a huge toll on our physical, emotional and mental well-being. It weakens our immune systems and causes perspiration, muscle stiffness, headaches, and trouble breathing.

(<http://www.hhblife.com/mind/stress-management/good-stress-vs-bad-stress.html#>)

The following emotional and physical disorders have been linked to stress:

- depression
- heart attacks
- insomnia
- hypertension
- imbalances that can increase ones susceptibility to ward off infections
- gastrointestinal disturbances: GERD, peptic ulcer, colitis
- skin changes: rashes, hives, eczema

(<http://www.stress.org/stress-effects/#sthash.wTMIUlxM.dpuf>)

Knowing this, what can we do? During this month of Tevet, challenge yourself to sign up for the self-care challenge. Take 20-30 minutes a day for yourself and make sure that 'ME' is in the top three of your daily list.

Hillel used to say: *"If I am not for myself who will be for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?"* Who will nurture and care for us, if we don't care for ourselves?

So here is a list of nurturing behaviors that will help during this month. Pick a few, or even just one, try them on for size. If it doesn't fit, choose another.

- Start the day by taking time to pray or meditate. Notice what you feel in your body, tune in to your breathing, and acknowledge thoughts without hooking into any particular thought or story.
- Take a big deep breath, and as you exhale over 5-10 seconds, focus in on breathing in calmness, and exhaling stress....breathe in calmness and fear....find your own affirmations-breathing in the positive and letting go of the negative.
- Make a list of things that you find joy or happiness in. Schedule a ME day: go to the museum, take a class, just sit and relax.
- If you like to walk, take a walk in the park, the city, wherever. Listen and pay attention to the sights, sounds and colors. Appreciate the uniqueness.
- Exercise.
- Read.
- Soak in a hot relaxing bath.
- Get a massage.
- Nurture yourself.
- Rather than making a 'To Do' list, make a 'Let Go' list. What can you get rid of that will not really impact your life immediately? Can the mundane tasks of life wait another day so you can enjoy some respite time for yourself?

Give yourself a gift, give yourself permission to say YES to yourself. It is well worth the price.

Iris Stendig-Raskin has been a women's health nurse practitioner for more than 20 years with a strong interest in complementary medicine. She is a REIKI master/teacher as well as a Theta practitioner. She has been a member of Tifereth Israel synagogue (Bensalem, Pennsylvania) for over 30 years, held various positions in sisterhood, and currently is co-president of the synagogue for the third time.