

A year of self care

Eve Menezes Cunningham has spent years learning how to improve her mindset and health. Here, she shares her most powerful practices to take you through each season – enlightened and kinder to yourself

My training in various therapies began 15 years ago, while I was struggling to help myself feel better. Daily pain – from then-undiagnosed endometriosis – meant I was battling with my full-time job in publishing alongside ongoing, invasive medical investigations. I began with a three-year crystal therapy course at weekends, with no intention of practising, but simply to learn about something that interested me. It was a catalyst for looking at my lifestyle as a whole: I gave up smoking and alcohol and felt empowered by taking my health into my own hands.

I had surgery, but my health continued to fluctuate. The idea of becoming self-employed grew more appealing and, having also trained as a life coach, I took the plunge. Over the following 12 years, my freedom allowed me to add other therapies to my repertoire: I became an advanced EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) practitioner, NLP master practitioner, psychosynthesis counsellor, integrative coach-therapist (and deputy chair of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's coaching division), a yoga therapist and instructor, as well as an integrative clinical supervisor.

I've learned it's the little things we do every day that make the biggest difference. I hope some of my self-care ideas will help you make the most of the year ahead, while remembering all the tools you've already collected, and which work for you.

Winter Heart opening

During my yoga therapy training, I learned that 80 per cent of the signals between body and brain go via the vagus nerve, which runs from the brainstem through the oesophagus, lungs, heart and abdomen. Opening this area can have a huge impact on our state of mind. Restorative fish is one of my favourite poses. It allows us to gently expand the heart centre, with additional mood-boosting benefits. Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you. Place a yoga bolster, or pillows, fist-distance away from your lower back or, if it's more comfortable, against your back, and lie down gently. If the backbend feels too deep, you may want to place a folded blanket over the upper part of the bolster. Ultimately, it should feel like a comfortable place to rest for a few minutes. If you feel vulnerable, drape a blanket over yourself. Don't force anything; just pay attention to your breath and the thoughts that arise. For many, this pose brings up feelings of forgiveness, love, acceptance and positivity.

Ecological goal-setting

One of my favourite elements of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) is the ecological approach to goal-setting. This means pondering the impact our goals have on our lives, from all angles, including how they will benefit our community, family, and the world. For example, your plan to get promoted and earn more money could help you contribute more to, say, an environmental charity you care about. Your added influence could also benefit your

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