

YOUR 7-DAY CHALLENGE TO RADICAL SELF-CARE

**PROVEN SELF-CARE
PRACTICES FOR
HIGH ACHIEVING
WOMEN**



JEN MURTAGH COACHING



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A NOTE FROM JEN MURTAGH

OH HEY THERE HIGH ACHIEVER!
YOU MIGHT WANT TO READ THIS...

Admittedly, self-care never used to be a huge priority for me. In fact, my idea of self-care for a really long time focused only on things like pedicures or massages a few times a year. Now don't get me wrong, both of those things are important, but they do not constitute a high level of self-care.

I would often find myself scheduling self-care time and then I would get busy working or functioning for my family, and those good intentions I had of prioritizing myself went out the window. The ironic thing is, I would then start to get resentful that I never had any time for myself. In looking back I realize I didn't actually value myself enough to prioritize myself, and I was co-creating the problem I had come to deeply resent.

What I have learned is that self-care and the ability to put up boundaries around our self-care is intrinsically tied to our feelings of self-worth. I had to find new ways that showed I valued myself beyond all of my doing, pleasing and over functioning. It wasn't easy at first! The old Jen who accessed most of her worth from achieving and accomplishing got really uncomfortable saying no, risking disappointing people and letting balls drop. But like a lot of things, it got easier and I got more comfortable doing it.

My new motto became "because I love and value myself, I am going to take care of myself". This included saying no to things, speaking to myself differently, rediscovering what brought me joy, taking time to be still (without holding on to a false belief I was being lazy) and putting up hard-core boundaries.

Through this learning journey I have realized that self-care is really all about self-preservation. As I do less, I become more. As I value my own needs, I am then able to give more to others from a place of abundance, rather than depletion.

These self-care practices have now become the backbone of how I remain creative, strategic, joyful and sane! I hope they may be of service to you too.

Jen Murtagh

Jen Murtagh
Certified Leadership Coach



OK, LET'S TALK ABOUT RADICAL SELF-CARE



“CARING FOR MYSELF IS NOT SELF-INDULGENCE, IT IS SELF-PRESERVATION, AND THAT IS AN ACT OF POLITICAL WARFARE.” –AUDRE LORDE

High achieving women are holding a lot. Big careers, volunteer work, caring for aging parents and families and everything in between. Having gone through burnout myself (a few times), I have spent years researching self-care and how NOT to burnout. I did this because life kept serving me the same lesson, until I decided to actually learn it. Instead of spending my days hustling for my self-worth by achieving, pleasing and over functioning, I learned how to value my existence, even if that meant doing nothing!

In this challenge, I have gathered some of my favourite practices that have helped me stay as far away from burnout as possible. I encourage you to look at this list and pick some (if not all!) and decide how you may integrate them into your life.

It's not going to be easy to embrace radical self-care, in fact, it might be downright uncomfortable. You see, research will show that women are wired to please. For thousands of years we were dependant upon others for survival, so the idea of putting up boundaries, ending people pleasing and saying yes to yourself (and possibly no to something or someone else) can actually make us feel a great degree of fear. My advice to you - do it anyway. Choose disappointing others over disappointing yourself. It takes tiny acts of bravery every day in pursuit of a life that doesn't put us on the bottom of our endless 'to do' list. When you begin to attend to your self-care you are sending a message to yourself that you value yourself. I guarantee you - the more you do it, the easier it will become.



SILENCE

Did you know our cortisol levels (stress hormone) are highest in the morning? When I learned this, I vowed to begin my day with silence. Instead of reaching for my phone when I wake up, I now sit up (so I don't fall back asleep) and put my hand on my heart and say "thank you". I spend the first five minutes in bed in silence, breathing and asking myself "how am I feeling today?, what do I most need today?"

After doing more research about why silence is so good for you, I now understand why people pay big money for silent retreats. It's in my goals for 2021! The biggest benefit of silence for me has been the ability to connect with my inner knowing and intuition. In connecting in with my body and letting my mind quiet, I have been able to hear so much more than when I was racing through life, caught up in doing 99.9% of the time.

Silence has many health benefits including:

- Boost the body's immune system.
- Benefit brain chemistry by growing new cells. A 2013 study found that two hours of silence could create new cells in the hippocampus region, a brain area linked to learning, remembering, and emotions.
- Decrease stress by lowering blood cortisol levels and adrenaline.
- Furthermore, according to a 2006 study in Heart, two minutes of silence relieves tension in the body and brain and is more relaxing than listening to music.
- Increases creativity power!



How to incorporate more silence in your day:

- Prioritize nature. Walk near the water or in the trees. Your brain will also thank you!
- Spend the first 5 minutes of your day in bed, in silence. Breathe, ask yourself what you most deeply desire to contribute to, to create or to express? Then listen.
- Meditate. Research has shown that within 10 days, new neural pathways can form in your brain (just by meditating!)
- Book a virtual silent retreat (or post Covid, one in person).
- Lock yourself in your room and put a note on your door called "Silent Time" (I also am a fan of hiding in the closet if you have kids that will never leave you alone)



SELF-COMPASSION

If you are a high achiever, there's a pretty good chance you have a loud inner critic. You know, the voice that wants to keep you small and safe? The one that tells you how lousy you are doing everything. Yah, her. She's probably been around for years.

One of the greatest lessons I ever learned about the inner critic was by Tara Mohr who says "*you are not the critical voice. You are the person aware of the critical voice*". Once you become aware of the voice of the inner critic, instead of trying to silence her - turn towards her and imagine yourself embracing her. When I hear my inner critic telling me how I am a mediocre mom, I recognize it's the voice (not me) and tell her "you're just doing the best job you can" (and you are). Quietening your inner critic takes practice but over time you will notice she isn't as loud as she used to be. This is a fundamental element of radical self-care.

I learned much about radical self-compassion through another Tara - Tara Brach. Her work on awakening from the trance of unworthiness is a beautiful way to lean deeper into compassion. She writes "*the old skin that is most difficult to shed is our core belief that something is wrong with us - that we are deficient or flawed*." It is only when we wake up from this trance that we learn to more more deeply connect with others and ourselves. Imagine the freedom of shedding that old skin and feeling like something is wrong with you and what that might open up for you?

- Quiet your inner critic and extend yourself self-compassion, seeing yourself for who you really are not an old story of who you think you are.
- Do not believe your thoughts. Our thoughts often limit our ability to see the truth because our thoughts come with our own filter. Research has shown that 80% of what creates our experience of a situation comes from inside of our own heads (and only 20% from external circumstances).
- Who are you beyond your beliefs? For more work on radical self-compassion, I encourage you to explore Tara Brach's book 'Radical Compassion' and her RAIN method (recognize, allow, investigate, nurture)
- Who would you be and what might be possible for you if you no longer believed (insert inner critic limiting belief here)?
- Begin a practice of self-compassion meditations found widely online and through meditation apps such as Calm, Insight Timer, Headspace and Peloton.
- Look at yourself in the mirror every. single. day and say "I love you (name)".



SLEEP

There is a reason why Arianna Huffington wrote an entire book about the importance of sleep. Sleep is the foundation of self-care. We need 7-9 hours of sleep a night as adults to function. During that time our long-term memory gets organized, cells get repaired and our immune system is strengthened.

- End screen time 30-60 mins before bed (and first thing in the morning, as your cortisol levels are highest then. aka. your stress hormone).
- Try a 5-10 mins sleep meditation before bed.
- Don't use your phone as an alarm clock. Hello Alexa and Google! They will wake you up with a nice song. Plug your phone in another room.
- Try going to be at relatively the same time each night (yes, even on the weekends).



SAYING NO

Ah, the magical art of saying no without feeling like we need to explain ourselves. It's the lesson I keep learning and a vital part of radical self-care! I hate to be the one to break this to you but if you want to live a life on your terms and with meaning, you have to get used to saying no (and risk you might disappoint people and feel guilty doing it).

- Never say yes first. As a high-achiever you probably already have more than enough on your plate, right? So, it's either a "no, I am not available for that" or "let me get back to you". Gut check and then respond, with grace, if you so choose.
- Come up with new ways of saying no that feel aligned with your values. ie. "I really appreciate you thinking of me for that but I am not available." ([Here are 99 other ways to say no](#))
- Proactively write a "hell no" list and post it in a place where you will see it (my list includes: no more volunteer work right now, no working past 6pm, no rushing, no gossiping, no to doing my own taxes, no toxic people...you get the gist) What is on your 'hell no' list?
- Ask yourself - is this something I WANT to do or I feel like I SHOULD do? If it's a "should" and you can say no, say no.
- Don't apologize in saying no. You have nothing to apologize for.
- Saying no gets easier over time. Saying no is a way you can show up to value yourself. When we can begin to value our own needs as much as we value everyone else's needs, your life will begin to shift in a way you can't even imagine. Trust me, it took me only about two decades to learn this. But when I did, oh boy - watch out world!



SWEAT

Research shows that exercising can add years to our lives. A good old regular sweat session is an essential part of self-care. It helps control weight, combats disease, improves mood, boosts energy and helps you sleep.

- What does a reasonable exercise routine look like for you?
- How can you schedule it into your weekly schedule and hold onto it for dear life?
- Who can you enrol to hold you accountable and support you as you prioritize it?
- What do you actually enjoy doing where you build up a good sweat?



SIMPLIFY

If you say yes to something, what are you saying no to? You can't keep adding things to your life without removing things. So how can we simplify our lives? Well, what about quitting things? You heard right, quit things! Quitting is for winners. Hate the volunteer board you are on? Resign. Social media leaving you feeling less than worthy? Quit it (or at least take it off your phone for a week). What is no longer working for you and how can you release it?

A few things that have helped me simplify my life include: grocery delivery, meal prep ordering service, consigning my clothes and limiting the amount of activities my kids are in. I have also simplified my life by getting really real on what expectations are realistic and what can I let go of in order to ensure I have the kind of energy I need for myself and my family. How can you simplify?



SPIRITUALITY

First, define what spirituality means to you. I think about spirituality as how I am nurturing my spirit. What kinds of things nurture your spirit? It might be a walk in nature, being in stillness, meditating, prayer, attending a virtual or in person community service. Sometimes we forget "*we are spiritual beings having a human experience*" (Stephen Covey).

I have learned that a spiritual self-care practice is any ritual that connects you to your true self, the real you. Taking time for spiritual self-care is soul-fulfilling. It encourages introspection and offers clarity and comfort. When we quieten our mind, move out of thinking and into listening, we connect with the core of who we are.



SUPPORT

Have you found yourself over-giving, self-sacrificing and doing things out of obligation rather than wanting?

Don't worry, you aren't alone. For thousands of years women were dependant upon others for survival. *"The impulse to please people, to be aware of the needs of others and to take care of other people, it's hardwired into our nervous system as what enabled us to survive. If we take our attention off that place, it often feels like our very survival might be at stake. In the context of our lives, where we haven't had power and we've felt dependent, we've become overly focused on tuning into and sensing the needs of other people."* (Dr. Claire Zammit).

Why is asking for help hard? What has been the cost to you, your health, your joy and your life in continuing to "do it all?" What are your healthy needs for support? What would you do with the time freed up by letting others support you?

We have many reasons why we don't ask for support. These can include not wanting to appear weak, not wanting to hear no if we ask, believing only we can do it the right way, and not wanting to feel indebted to anyone. It is hard to relinquish control but I have learned and embraced (though difficult) that "done is better than perfect". When we let others help we empower them and that is a gift that helps not just us but also those we care about.

- Striving to 'have it all' and 'do it all' leaves us exhausted and depleted. Asking for help and accepting support is another way we can show up to value ourselves. Our value and worth is not based on our doing, it's based on our being.
- This week, I encourage you to create a "Support the Household" list and pin it up in your kitchen. Discuss it with your family over dinner or with the individuals you want to receive the help from. What would you put on the list? When would you like to have the support completed by? What should the support person do if they miss the deadline?
- Asking for support may not be comfortable at first and it will feel vulnerable, but it does get easier over time. This is one of the critical steps of radical self-care and I encourage you to find small and big ways each week to ask for support and delegate.



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

At the root of all of our desires is a need to be loved and to belong. Social Connectedness is one of our fundamental human needs and it impacts our mental health, physical health, and longevity. Having strong social ties is also part of our self-care.

One landmark study showed that lack of social connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure. In the studies of the Blue Zones around the world (the areas which have the highest level of people living over 100+ years), social connectedness has shown to be a significant correlating factor to longevity!

Covid-19 has brought about challenges to how connected we all are in person but it is still a critical piece of our self-care. The quality of our relationships matter. It doesn't actually matter how many friends you have or followers. Yay for Introverts! The benefits of social connectedness are derived from how we feel about the quality of our connections.

- How can I develop more meaningful and connected relationships?
- Who do I want to develop more meaningful relationships with?
- How can I make time in my schedule to prioritize social connection?



THE FOUNDATION OF RADICAL SELF-CARE

Use the boxes to write your commitments to self-care using the categories above as a guide.

SILENCE

SELF-COMPASSION

SLEEP

(ie. new sleep routines, desired # hours etc)

SAYING NO

SWEAT

SIMPLIFY

SPIRITUALITY

SUPPORT

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS





RADICAL SELF-CARE JOURNALING QUESTIONS

QUESTION #1: What one routine could I put in place this month that would improve my life the most?

QUESTION #2: What do I know I need right now in order to feel nurtured, healthy and connected to my own needs?

QUESTION #3: What is going to get in the way of prioritizing radical self-care and how do I remove those barriers? Who can I ask for support?





JEN MURTAGH

CERTIFIED LEADERSHIP COACH

I am an award-winning C-Suite executive with 20 years of experience working in both corporate and non-profit. I coach female leaders to live + lead bravely so they can create meaningful impact and design a life they love, without burning out in the process.

I believe deeply in the limitless potential of my clients, and nurture that potential from them with compassion and accountability. I support women in shattering their inner glass ceiling, so they can transform the way they live and lead.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

BOOKS TO NURTURE YOUR ONGOING PRACTICE OF RADICAL SELF-CARE

- **Radical Compassion** by Tara Brach
- **Drop the Ball** by Tiffany Dufu
- **Extreme Self-Care** by Cheryl Richardson
- **Do Less** by Kate Northrup
- **Playing Big** by Tara Mohr
- **A Mind at Home with Itself** by Byron Katie
- **Self-Compassion** by Kristin Neff
- **Feminine Power Course** by Dr. Claire Zammit



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