

"I need more me-time!"

Feel as if you're running on empty? Our experts share the easy ways to put you on your priority list, so you can reap all the proven benefits of me-time, such as easing stress, boosting your creativity and even experiencing more joy at home and at work!

Recharge on the go!

Tune out for 15 minutes!

Turning off your cellphone for 15 minutes while you read a magazine or telling yourself you'll block off that much time to take a walk outside helps you notice life's small pleasures wherever they pop up during the rest of the day, says self-care expert Jennifer Louden. It also gives you a sense of accomplishment—I did that for myself—which reenergizes you for more challenging projects.



Try a moving meditation!

No time to put up your feet? No problem! Consider what stress expert Debbie Mandel calls a "moving meditation." "You don't need to be still to focus on yourself," she says. "Even when you're doing must-do's like washing the dishes, you can make it a calming, meditative experience just by 'recalling your compliments.'" Translation? "Think about the people who really know you and the nice things they've said or done for you, like, say, your best friend telling you how funny you are or the time your daughter gave you a card that read *The best mom in the world*. Recalling those special bonds makes you feel great about yourself, which puts the focus back on you and lifts you up."

Pack a Zen kit!

Just as you would keep a first-aid kit in your car, pack a self-care kit. Include everything from a magazine to read while waiting to fill prescriptions, to an audio book for long trips, to a lavender sachet you can sniff when stressed in traffic. Why is on-the-go Zen vital? It takes only five minutes of "me-time" to trigger relaxing brain waves.

Focus on the rewards!

Say no to the "shoulds"!

One reason so many of us don't manage to find time for ourselves is that whenever there's a break in our routine, we fill it with things we think we "should" do, such as straightening our desk or cleaning out the fridge. "Instead, give yourself permission to take time for yourself—alone-time does everything from recharge your creativity to boost your willpower," says expert Laura Stack. What's more, according to a recent study, the stress-melting benefits actually up your resistance to illness, helping ensure you're able to do your best at home and at work!

Head off stress overloads!

It's easy to make me-time extra soothing and enjoyable with a few simple tweaks, says Stack. "Reading a book, for example, is proven to relax you," she says. "But why not really maximize that moment by softly reading aloud—hearing the words on the page stimulates pleasure centers in your brain by engaging more of your senses. If you're listening to music, tap along or dance. If you're taking a bubble bath, light a few candles and linger two extra minutes—anything to make it more special and involve more of your senses. Whatever you choose to do, make it a ritual and personalize it!"

Plan ahead!

Mark a purple spot!

Do the squares on your calendar fill up so fast that there's literally no time for you? To prevent that from happening, at the start of every month, mark a spot on the calendar to indicate a "me-time" day, suggests Stack. "I use a round purple garage-sale sticker on my calendar. That way, I've reserved a day to maybe call a friend to have lunch, or drive to Cold Stone Creamery and get my favorite



Me-time makes you smarter!

Enjoying a few minutes of me-time each week is like a massage for your brain, helping you solve problems more easily and improve fine-motor skills, a recent study shows.

full-fat, full-sugar vanilla ice cream with Heath Bar and Butterfinger. I may not know what I'm going to do, but I do know that I have a day to do it!" And that's key, she says: "If

you pencil in a specific activity, it's easier to cancel—you can just tell yourself, oh, I'll go to the park next week. But once you put a 'purple personal day' on the horizon, there's no canceling it because it can mean anything you want it to—even if you suddenly get busy that day, you can still fit in something 'purple' just for you."

Make a list of three Ds!

Another way to easily find room for me-time: Make a list of three Ds: your *dreams*, to-do's and the things you can *delegate* to others. Say you've always wanted to start a baking blog, but could never find the time. Slot that under the "dreams" column. Make another column for to-do's, look it over and then move any to-do's that others can do instead to the "delegate" column. Giving away just a few tasks will open up time for yourself—making your "dreams" more do-able than ever!

—Kristina Mastrocola



Our expert panel



Jennifer Louden—author of *The Woman's Comfort Book*—is an internationally known self-care and personal growth expert. Visit her at JenniferLouden.com.



Stress management expert **Debbie Mandel, M.A.**, is the author of *Addicted to Stress: A Woman's 7 Step Program to Reclaim Joy and Spontaneity in Life*.



Productivity expert **Laura Stack, MBA, CSP** has authored or coauthored 10 books, including *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do* and *The Exhaustion Cure*.

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