



Celebrate you

March 8 is International Women's Day. This globally-recognized day celebrates women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements. It also aims to raise awareness about women's equality and accelerate gender parity.

One of many ways we can help empower women is through encouraging increased self-esteem. Self-esteem is having respect or confidence in yourself and how you interpret your abilities, appearance, and/or attributes. Self-esteem impacts every area of our lives, including our mental and emotional health and how we operate at work and in relationships.

Along the spectrum of self-esteem, some people have a high sense of self-worth. Others find they have very low self-esteem, possibly facing symptoms of depression or anxiety. Feeling inadequate, unlovable or unworthy may accompany a lower self-image. It's important to remember wherever you fall on the spectrum, you are not alone.

Determining self-esteem

There are some useful ways to determine self-esteem. Consider the following:

- **Strengths** - Take inventory by writing down your positive qualities and areas you would like to develop.
- **Success** - Do you downplay or explain away your successes? Many times we set perfection as the goal, only to be regularly disappointed. Are you able to receive compliments, or do you merely brush them aside? Being able to celebrate our accomplishments is a sign of a healthy self-esteem.
- **Standards** - Are you comparing yourself to others? Research shows people who spend too much time on social media are more likely to struggle with low self-esteem because they are constantly comparing themselves to others. This will not help improve our self-esteem.
- **Potential** - Have you considered you may not know everything about yourself? Take some time to discover

what hidden strengths and passions you might have. Exploring a new hobby, activity or talent may increase your self-esteem.

Improving self-esteem

If you are looking to better your self-confidence, here are several practical steps to follow as you take inventory of your thoughts:

1. **Triggers** — Identify what or who triggers negative thinking. Looking at your bank account? Interactions with certain family members or coworkers? You can't avoid every trigger, but you can plan your response.
2. **Self-talk** — What do you tell yourself? Is it based on fact or emotion? Is it rational or irrational? Assuming the worst in every situation will take a toll on your self-esteem.
3. **Accuracy** — Are your thoughts true? If not, challenge them. Often times our thoughts are influenced more by perception than reality.
4. **Positivity** — Replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Encourage yourself by focusing on the positive. Avoid thinking of "should have" and "could have" scenarios. When mistakes are made, you can learn to forgive yourself. Give yourself credit for good things and small wins.

Taking care of yourself

Learning to change how you interpret life takes energy. Taking time every day to care for yourself will help you feel healthy. And when you feel good, you are more likely to be positive about yourself and your abilities. Listen to your body, get plenty of sleep, eat healthy and exercise regularly. Take time for activities and people you enjoy most. A simple way to enjoy life and stay positive is to help someone else.

Rearranging your thoughts and learning to take care of your body takes time and practice. The more you challenge your negative thoughts and habits, the more confident you will feel in yourself and your actions. When you are positive about yourself, you will have a positive impact on the world around you.

On international women's day and every day be sure to celebrate you and all the women in your life.

Minimize electronic use to enhance sleep

Many studies have shown the importance of getting 7–9 hours of sleep every night. More recently, we have also learned that the use of electronics at night can alter our ability to get restful sleep. Whether it's watching television or using our phones, electronic use has been linked to shorter sleep duration, sleep anxiety and increased night waking.

These sleep issues happen for a number of reasons. First, the light being emitted from devices affects circadian rhythm. Circadian rhythm plays into our biological patterns, including hormone release, blood pressure and body temperature. When our eyes focus on light, such as electronics, it tells our body that it's time to be awake. Not giving our eyes and minds time to adjust before bedtime will make it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Our melatonin production is also affected by electronic use. Melatonin is a hormone that helps maintain our sleep-wake cycle by telling the brain when to feel tired. The more we use electronics at night, the longer it takes for melatonin to kick in and help us fall asleep.

Tips for getting restful sleep

It might not be possible to completely cut electronic use before bed, but there's a lot you can do to ensure a restful night's sleep. Here are some tips to get started:

- **Limit electronic use throughout the day.** While nighttime screen use greatly impacts our sleep, it's important to limit use during the day as well. If you need extra help, try updating phone settings so you're unable to use your device after a certain number of hours. You can also create rules for how much TV time you're allowed every day.
- **Create a bedtime routine.** Having a relaxing routine will help set you up for sleep success. Try stopping screen use an hour before bed and focusing on other activities to help you unwind. This may include yoga, meditation, journaling, reading or a bath.
- **Remove screens from the bedroom.** If you rely on a TV to fall asleep, think again. Screen light in any form affects your sleep cycle. If you need sound to fall asleep, try using a sound machine. If light is the issue, buy a small plug-in to help without it being too much. It can take time to get used to this new routine, but your brain will thank you.
- **Turn on night mode.** Most devices now have a "dark" or "night" mode, including social media apps. Using this setting will help your eyes adjust to the inevitable "lights out" time better.
- **Buy a pair of blue light glasses.** If you're having trouble staying away from electronics, investing in these glasses might help. They block your eyes from damaging blue light emissions, and you can usually get a good pair for less than \$50.

Give yourself a break

Most of us probably recognize the value of showing kindness and compassion to others. But how about when it comes to ourselves? Being kind and compassionate to yourself is just as important. And with practice, you can make self-compassion a habit. Here are some tips.

Celebrate small accomplishments

You don't have to achieve big things to feel proud of yourself. The small things really do add up. So you can feel good about those things too. Maybe you didn't work out three times this week like you planned. Give yourself credit for what you did do. If you exercised once, that's something. If you took a walk around the block, that's something too.

Don't believe everything you think

On harder days, you might find yourself having more negative thoughts. For example, you might have a conflict with a coworker and think, "That's going to get back to my boss, and I sure won't get promoted now." It's helpful to acknowledge the thoughts you're having. But you don't have to accept them as fact.

Check your self-talk

The things you tell yourself can have a big effect on how you feel about yourself. And a lot of us are much harder on ourselves than we would be on others. If that's true for you, try shifting your self-talk to be more forgiving. For example, if you're beating yourself up about a mistake you made, take a step back. Try kind and encouraging self-talk instead. You can say, "This is new, and I'm doing my best," or "I'm caring for my family, and I'm doing a good job."

Remind yourself of your good qualities

When you get into a loop of negative self-talk, defend yourself. Write down your positive traits or things you're good at. These don't have to be major things, like "I once saved a puppy from a rushing river." They can be everyday things, like "I make very good pancakes," or "I'm a good listener."

Do something just for you

Commit to doing something kind for yourself every day. Maybe for you, self-care means making time to exercise, do a hobby or journal. Or maybe it's reading a magazine in the bath away from your children for 10 minutes. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it's something positive and healthy.