

A person in a yoga pose on a beach with text overlay. The person is in a wide-legged stance with arms raised, set against a background of waves and a bright sky. The text 'Starts with Me' is written in a large, stylized font. 'Starts' is in blue, 'with' is in a smaller blue font, and 'Me' is in blue. To the right of 'Me' is a yellow circular logo containing a stylized 'A' or 'D' shape.

Starts with Me

SELF CARE AND SELF AWARENESS GUIDE

**Everyday practices
to improve wellbeing,
promote resilience,
and nurture self
compassion**

If we hope to go anywhere or develop ourselves in any way, we can only step from where we are standing. If we don't really know where we are standing—a knowing that comes directly from the cultivation of mindfulness—we may only go in circles, for all our efforts and expectations.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

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INTRODUCTION

The contents of this guide will help you follow a path of self-awareness, self-compassion, and emotional wellbeing that will help you cultivate good mental health. What follows is a series of questions that will encourage you to clarify how these qualities influence your moment-to-moment experience.

Life has its ups and downs. The goal of building your emotional wellbeing is *not* to stop the experience of difficult thoughts & emotions, make them go away, or only allow good ones. Rather, it is to help you develop the ability to **notice when they arise within you** during both enjoyable and difficult situations in your life.

By expanding your field of awareness by looking at everyday experiences non-reactively, you strengthen your natural ability to improve the quality of your life and to carry yourself each day with a sense of agency and resilience.

Awareness is key! Noticing your strengths and weaknesses is the first step toward emotional wellbeing.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

START WITH THE WHY.

My why is, "I don't want to live with addiction and be tormented by my mental health issues. I live by these practices so I can liberate myself, and help others do the same".

To help us develop the discipline to practice self-care, self-awareness, and wellbeing, we must understand our own Why.

Your why is your underlying motivation for developing and sticking to self-care routines. It's easy to start something that promises to improve your life, but an ongoing practice is what develops self-care, resilience, and an overall state of positive health and wellbeing. Knowing why you practice will help keep you practicing.

WRITE IT DOWN

Ask yourself: why are you going to develop a self-care practice?

"The practice itself has to become the daily embodiment of your vision and contain what you value most deeply."

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*

GETTING STARTED

Start by observing your current state of mind and body.

WRITE IT DOWN

Ask yourself:

- Did I get a decent sleep last night (am I tired)?
- Have I eaten recently?
- Have I drunk water today?
- What thoughts am I having right now?
- What **body sensations** am I experiencing right now?
- What **feelings** am I experiencing right now?

REFERENCE FOR BODY SENSATIONS (possibilities)

Calm	Relaxed	Dull	Empty	Dizzy
Energized	Open	Frozen	Sensitive	Spacey
Warm	Light	Pain	Bruised	Breathless
Cool	Spacious	Blocked	Achy	Electric
Flowing	Knotted	Contracted	Sore	Tingling
Drained	Hot	Heavy	Tense	Nervy

Source: Larisa Noonan

REFERENCE FOR FEELINGS (possibilities)

SAD	MAD	SCARED	PEACEFUL	POWERFUL	JOYFUL
Lonely	Hurt	Rejected	Content	Hopeful	Excited
Guilty	Angry	Confused	Loving	Proud	Sexy
Ashamed	Hateful	Helpless	Trusting	Respected	Creative
Inferior	Critical	Insecure	Nurturing	Important	Aware
Stupid	Selfish	Anxious	Thankful	Valuable	Amused
Miserable	Jealous	Weak	Relaxed	Confident	Delighted
Apathetic	Irritated	Discouraged	Sentimental	Intelligent	Fascinated

Source: Dr. Gloria Wilcox

TAKE NOTICE

THOUGHTS

What you are thinking and the nature of your thoughts.

E.g. negative, hopeful, grandiose

BEHAVIOURS

Actions—what you are doing or not doing.

E.g. Getting exercise, resting, substance use

FEELINGS

The emotions you're experiencing right now.

E.g. sad, nervous, excited, confident

PHYSICAL STATE

Changes in or current state of your physical body.

E.g. weight gain or loss, excessive sweating

MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT

The **Starts With Me** message is that each of us has the innate capacity for wellbeing. It is our responsibility to do what we can to strengthen it, so we can then share that strength with others. We can't share what we don't have. To embody wellbeing, we must practice taking care of our mind, body, and spirit regularly.

Mind, body, and spirit are three terms often used when trying to understand a holistic view of wellness. To embark or continue your journey, it is important to take care of yourself on each of these levels.

Ask yourself the following questions to understand how you might actively take care of your mind, body, and spirit.

MIND

WRITE IT DOWN

- What does taking care of my mind look and feel like to me?
- What thoughts and feelings do I have when my mind is being nourished?
- What thoughts and feelings do I have when my mind is being neglected?
- What happens in my life when my mind is being nourished?
- What happens in my life when my mind is being neglected?
- What are the things that pollute my mind?
- Can I identify what it feels like when my mind starts to feel out of balance?

BODY

WRITE IT DOWN

- What does taking care of my physical health look like?
- What does neglecting my physical health look like?
- How do I feel when my physical health is being nourished?
- What happens in my life when my physical health is nourished?
- What happens in my life when my physical health is neglected?
- What are the things that get in my way of nurturing my physical health?
- What might I do differently to allow for more nurturing of my physical health?

SPIRIT

WRITE IT DOWN

- What does spirit mean to me?
- What does taking care of my spirit look like?
- What happens in my life when my spirit is nourished?
- How do I feel when my spirit is being nourished?
- What happens in my life when my spirit is not nourished?
- What things do I do, or can I do, to nurture my spirit?
- What things do I do to prevent the nurturing of my spirit?

“When mind, body, and spirit are in harmony, happiness is the natural result.”

Deepak Chopra

DEVELOPING YOUR PRACTICE

Now that you have taken stock of your current state of mind, body, and spirit, you can actively nurture and nourish them. The following simple activities are a good place to start.

GRATITUDE

WRITE IT DOWN

- What are three things I am grateful for today?
- Can I describe two moments in my day when I could've nurtured gratitude?
- What feelings and thoughts do I have when I'm experiencing gratitude?
- What can I do to have more experiences like these?
- What does it look like when I'm not practicing gratitude?
- What feelings and thoughts do I have when I'm not practicing gratitude?

NURTURING SELF-COMPASSION

WRITE IT DOWN

- List two things you like about yourself today.
- List two things you did recently that you would admire in other people.
- What does it look like in my life when I'm being kind, patient and forgiving to myself?
- What feelings and thoughts do I have when I'm being compassionate toward myself?
- What can I do to have more experiences like that?
- What does it look like when I'm not being kind to myself? How does it feel?
- What are the thoughts that get in my way of being kind and compassionate to myself?
- How might I change those thoughts?
- Can I forgive myself for something I did today that I'm not happy with?

ENJOYABLE MOMENTS

WRITE IT DOWN

- What was the moment I enjoyed most today?
- Was I aware of the enjoyable moment while it was happening?
- What thoughts and feelings was I experiencing at the time?
- What can I practice to have more moments like this?
- What gets in my way of opening to these experiences?

STRESSFUL MOMENTS

WRITE IT DOWN

- What was the moment that was most stressful or difficult for me today?
- Was I aware that I was under stress while it was happening?
- What thoughts and feelings was I experiencing at the time?
- How might I reduce the frequency of these moments?
- How do I know I am managing my stress in healthy ways?
- How do I know I am managing my stress in unhealthy ways?
- How do I feel when I know I am managing my stress as best I can?

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Having support from friends, family, colleagues and confidantes can help you maintain your practice and find support when you need it most.

WRITE IT DOWN

- Who do I like to reach out to when I'm looking for support?
- If I don't have people to reach out too, where can I start?
- Who are the people in my life who don't support my wellbeing?
- Where can I find groups of people or activities to strengthen my support networks?
- How do I feel when I know I can count on someone to help me?
- How do I feel when I know I am helping someone else?

GOALS

WRITE IT DOWN

Identify some wellbeing goals you'd like to achieve, to establish your practice. Some ideas include:

- I'd like to meditate 5 days a week for at least 5 minutes per day.
- I'd like to exercise 3 days a week for 30 minutes.
- I'd like to read for 20 minutes, 5 days a week, before I go to bed.
- I'd like to turn off my phone at 9pm so I can wind down before bed.
- I'd like to get involved in a team sport.
- I'd like to spend more time with my friends and family.
- I'd like to improve my diet.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Dr. Heidi Walk, MD. <https://heidewalk.com>

Jack Kornfield: <https://jackkornfield.com>

Dr. Dan Siegel, MD. <https://drdansiegel.com>

Sharon Salzberg: <https://sharonsalzberg.com>

<https://startswithme.ca/mental-health-resources>

SPECIAL THANKS

I want to express my gratitude to all the people who've helped me on my journey. This guide is inspired by the teachings of Heidi Walk, MD. I have learned so much from her and her teachings.

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PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH US



NOTES

A large, faint yellow watermark of a stylized character, possibly 'R', is centered on the page. The page contains horizontal blue lines for writing notes.