

MOOD BOOSTERS > HEALTHIER SNACKS > A.M. MEALS

Body & Spirit

LOVE YOURSELF TOOLKIT

Women are inherently loving, caring and nurturing. Trouble is, the one person we most often overlook when doling out all that compassion is ourselves. “How you treat yourself tells the world how you expect others to treat you,” says Helen MacMillan, a transformational life coach and founder of Btrue2Me Coaching, based in Columbia, Maryland. “This is why a lack of self-love can be damaging to your psyche.”

Throughout the day, even a hectic one, there are many opportunities to practice loving yourself. We assembled a life coach A-team: Lisa Nichols, best-selling author of *No Matter What* (Grand Central); Nicola Bird, Ph.D., author of *The Boomerang Effect* (iUniverse); and MacMillan. They’ve devised the following exercises to help you build your self-acceptance muscles. With them, we promise you’ll see some really big changes in your attitude and overall happiness as you stop trying to morph into the person you think you ought to be and start loving the wonderful person you already are. >

BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY



LET GO. Tell yourself, *I forgive myself and I'm putting my best foot forward*, Bird says: "You can't be happy if you constantly blame yourself." Forgiveness is empowering.

COMMEMORATE A WIN

Did you spring-clean your closets or finally pay off a credit card? MacMillan suggests reflecting on a goal you achieved and then reliving the experience: "Ask yourself, *How did I achieve that success? What skills did I use to reach my goal?*" Jot down the answers to those questions to identify some of the great strengths you have in your deep bag of skills.



PLAY MIRROR, MIRROR MacMillan suggests looking yourself in the eye in the mirror and saying, "I love you. I really, really love you." And don't just say the words—feel them. Think about how much you love your spouse, child or parent and then imagine loving yourself the same way. "It's a great way to start or end your day," she says. Too shy to say it out loud? "Say it to yourself in your mind," says MacMillan.

BUILD YOUR BIO

WRITE A 10-SENTENCE AUTOBIOGRAPHY THAT DESCRIBES WHAT'S MOST AUTHENTIC ABOUT YOU. THEN KEEP THAT BIO HANDY TO LOOK AT ONCE A WEEK OR MORE TO REMIND YOURSELF OF THE PERSON YOU ARE AT YOUR CORE, SAYS BIRD.



PICK A FAVORITE PHOTO

DIG OUT A FEW OF YOUR FAVORITE PICTURES OF YOURSELF (CHILDHOOD SNAPS WORK) AND MAKE A MENTAL NOTE OF AT LEAST THREE THINGS YOU LIKE ABOUT EACH ONE, SUGGESTS MACMILLAN.



Create a Feel-Good File

How often do you text a friend a note of encouragement or post an uplifting message on your sister's Facebook wall? "Treat yourself with that same nurturing attitude to validate your worth and boost confidence," says Bird. Save all the uplifting texts and e-mails you receive on your phone or laptop, and write yourself a few of your own. Then use that "Go, me!" file to throw yourself a compliment on those days when you could use a lift.

MAKE A PLAN

"Write the blueprint for how you want your life story to read," suggests Nichols. Pour out your soul on paper or screen. "Start with how you'd like the ending to be and work backward through all the positive experiences you can enjoy by loving yourself," says Nichols.

FRAME THE OPTION OF ACCEPTANCE

Print "You Deserve Happiness" on a piece of paper and frame it. Place it somewhere prominent to serve as a daily reminder that you're entitled to be happy, says Nichols.▷

TAP INTO POSITIVITY

Adopt a zero-tolerance policy for negative self-talk and turn your inner critic into a cheerleader. Whenever you're tempted to berate yourself, says MacMillan, lightly tap just below the inner end of your collarbone with the tips of your second and third fingers: "Tapping on that point will influence your nervous system and help calm you." While tapping, say to yourself, *Even though I'm not feeling positive right now, I choose to love and accept myself anyway.* "Do this for a few minutes, and then ask yourself, *What can I think or believe that would support or encourage me in this moment?*" says MacMillan. Next, while taking a few slow, deep breaths, lightly hit the center point of your breastbone and say words of encouragement and support to yourself. This stimulates one of your body's acupuncture points, helping soothe the mind.



RETHINK YOUR REFLECTION

The next time you catch a glimpse of yourself in a store window or the bathroom mirror, or see your shadow on a sunny day, resist the urge to critique the size and shape of your butt, thighs, belly and breasts. "Change the reason you look at your reflection," says MacMillan. Instead, rely on your mirror image for positive feedback. "Break the cycle of going to your reflection to be critical. And use it to assess something you like about yourself, like your eye color, skin tone or sassy attitude, and focus on that," says the life coach.

► **Love It or List It** Draw a line down a piece of paper and label the left side "I feel" and the right side "I prefer to feel." List your current emotions on the left and the corresponding emotion you'd rather feel on the right. Maybe you feel lonely because you're not in a relationship, but you could prefer to feel grateful for supportive friends. "It's a reminder that you can choose to adopt a different attitude about yourself," MacMillan says.

WOMAN: FELIX WIRTH/CORBIS; RETTA: PHOTOGRAPHY; MICHAEL ROWE; HAIR: MARCIA HAMILTON/MARGARET MALDONADO; MAKEUP: REGINALD DOWDLEY/TANU ARTIST AGENCY USING MAKE UP FOR EVER AND MAC; MANICURE: TRACY CLEMENS/OPUS BEAUTY USING CHANEL.

THE ART OF TREATING YOURSELF

THE COMEDIAN RETTA, WHO PLAYS LUXURY-LOVER DONNA ON NBC'S PARKS AND RECREATION, DOESN'T APOLOGIZE FOR ALLOWING HERSELF HER FAVORITE INDULGENCE

Treating myself didn't come easy to me. The phrase "Money is tight" was prominent in my childhood. Because of this mind-set, I never thought I could allow myself nice things. Nice = expensive. By the time I was grown I decided that since I earned my own money, I could give myself a few niceties.

It wasn't long before I developed an addiction: I love me some handbags! As I got older my tastes started to trend toward the pricey. The first time I saw the price tag on a Gucci bag I yelled out an audible "FOR REAL?!?!?! Oh, HELLLLLL no." Then the clerk appeared like an angel from on high and whispered that their half-off yearly sale was soon and to check back to see if it would

be on sale. It was! When I bought that supple suede hobo, my purse collecting began for real.

I own about 50 bags, but only half of them fall in what I call my top tier: Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Bulgari, Giorgio Armani, Badgley Mischka and Chanel. I am currently going through a Louis Vuitton's Vernis phase. I like the Vernis line not only because the items shine bright like a diamond (sung in RiRi's voice) but also because I love a structured bag. It just feels classy. My favorite shape is the Alma—I own three. Louis bags cost a grip but I *luuuurve* them. So much so that I name them: Candy (she's red, she was my first), Rooney (she's maroon), The Major (he's the only boy and he's army green), Skye (she's blue) and Pearl (she's pearl, obvi, and Mama's favorite). My newest girl may give Pearl a run for her money. She is the Deesse PM in rose velour. She's delicate. She's classic. She's perfect.

The bags in my trove are ridiculously expensive and I don't just buy every one I think is cute. People may think because I'm on TV I've got money to burn like sage in a haunted house. Not true. I allow myself one purchase a year. If I see one I like and am *still* fantasizing about it after I've left the store, I know it's a must-have, so I return and procure that chumpy. Once I sport the masterpiece and someone says, "I love your bag," then my acquisition becomes a triumph and my indulgence all the more worth it. Plus, I look *riiiiiii* cute with my new bag.

