

I NEVER SEEM  
TO HAVE ANY

# TIME FOR MYSELF



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When you make time for yourself you're often racked with guilt over how you think you ought to be using that time otherwise.

'Am I selfish?' you wonder. Well, ignore all the self-help guides on this one because the answer is yes, you are selfish – you're selfish because you're human.

In the most literal sense, selfish means placing your own wellbeing before the needs of others, and it's essential to keeping us on the planet.

If you don't take care of yourself, you can't do any of the things you do for other people. A small amount of selfishness is necessary, so don't beat yourself up about it.

## What to do

### Identify vicious cycles

Are your efforts to make time for other people self-defeating?

### Do selfish good deeds

Make a list of selfish things you can do for yourself every day.

### Get creative

Do something fun every week.

### Just say no

Accept your own selfishness, and everyone else's too.

### The awkward conversation

Don't be afraid to ask for more space.

### Re-evaluate leisure

Make a list of enjoyable things that take a bit of effort.

### Integrate

Work out how to slot 'me time' into your daily routine.

## Identify vicious cycles

A major reason why so many of us don't have any time to ourselves is because we're so hell-bent on pleasing others and proving ourselves to be good parents/friends/colleagues/partners.

But if we look at the effects of our actions closely, we see that they bring about the opposite of our desires:

You work long hours because you want to succeed professionally, but the resulting stress means your quality of work decreases.

You spend every evening with your partner because you want to make them happy, but the predictability of your routine makes your relationship less exciting.

You dote on your kids 24/7 because you want to be a good parent, but the resulting fatigue means you're less able to provide the attention they need.

If you struggle to be selfish, try breaking down your behaviours in this way.

It'll show you how your selflessness is not only self-defeating, but also impacts on those whom it's designed to serve.

## Do selfish good deeds

Writing in *Psychology Today*, journalist Melissa Blake claims 'it's good to be selfish', and compiles a list of all the things she can do just for herself – a list of things which serve no other purpose than to meet her own desires. 'Because when you think about it,' she writes, 'aren't you worth that much love to yourself? If you're so quick to give to others, I say it's time to give back to yourself.'

Make a list of the things you could do which aren't designed to satisfy others. Then make sure you do them. Start small, like Blake, who includes simple things like playing computer games and eating mint chocolate among her selfish good deeds.

Writing this list is a selfish act in itself, so embrace it, and try not to make yourself feel guilty about it.

## Get creative

But what if you're hankering for more than a little indulgence? What if you want your leisure time to be more creatively stimulating?

Try reading *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. It has a slightly spiritual bent which might not appeal to all, but it's also full of practical hints and tips about how to maximise your creativity when you're alone. The idea of the Artist's Date is especially appealing:

Make a date with yourself once a week, as you would with a friend whose company you value. Use that time to reconnect with your childlike creativity.

It doesn't matter if you were hopeless in art class or you couldn't think of a simile to save your life. 'Think mischief more than mastery', as Cameron says.

Use your first date to think of activities. Nothing is too basic or playful. Things like colouring, drawing faces on balloons or riding a bike are all brilliant ideas.

Creativity doesn't have to be about what you create, it can be about the unaffected openness you express while you're doing it. Nail it and your 'me time' will be a whole lot more satisfying.

## Just say 'no'

One common complaint of those who don't seem to have any time to themselves is 'I just can't say no.'

Some people just take on too much. We attend social events even though we're exhausted, we accept new work projects even though we're already completely snowed under, we sponsor our friends' fun runs even though we're broke.

We don't do these things because we want to, but because we're worried what people will think about us if we don't. We do these things begrudgingly. And that ain't healthy.

Start with a little rephrasing. 'I just can't say no' becomes 'I won't say no'. You can, you just choose not to.

Think of occasions when someone has said 'no' to you. Perhaps a friend cancelled on a drink or your brother declined to babysit. Maybe your boss said she didn't have time to 'go into it right now.'

If you were thinking flexibly and reasonably, you probably didn't hold a grudge for too long.

Take the chance that other people will extend the same courtesy to you.

Next time someone asks something of you and you feel like you're doing it out of obligation, say no.

Take the risk that they might be frustrated, but that they can live with it.

# The awkward conversation

Sometimes we spend so much time with our partners we begin to feel frustrated about not pursuing our own hobbies.

How do you introduce that rather bristly topic into your relationship? Firstly, have a practical solution in mind. What will you do to mix up this stagnant situation? Spend an evening away from your partner at the gym? Read a book in the bedroom while they watch TV? Take a night class?

Once you've hit on something that appeals to you, sit your partner down and tell them it's something you'd like to do.

Describe it as a way of bringing about positivity and diversity into your relationship.

## Re-evaluate leisure

With the proliferation of billboards bearing lotus poses and back massages, we've been beguiled into thinking that having time to oneself is synonymous with some kind of blissful reverie. But leisure doesn't need to be pure, elevated indulgence – work and play are not diametrically opposed to each other.

Make a list of all the things in your life which are enjoyable and worthwhile, such as relationships, having children, studying, etc. Next to each, make a note of the work they entail. We're sure you'll concede that everything truly worthwhile involves some level of effort.

Novelist Steve Pressfield's book on creativity, *Do the Work*, places emphasis on ploughing through the resistance points of any creative activity to bring about satisfaction.

He argues that you do not need to reach the state of zen-like bliss advertised by the leisure industry to truly enjoy your creative pursuits.

As you forge your own 'me time', try to incorporate an openness to effort. Team sports involve physical exertion, learning a language involves repetition, tightrope walking involves practise.

There's more to leisure time than candlelit baths and boozing in the sunshine.

## Integrate

Simply plucking three hours out of the air can be tricky. So rather than making it feel like a massive upheaval, make 'me time' part of what you're already doing.

How about taking twenty minutes after the grocery shop to enjoy a coffee over a magazine? Or popping to the bookstore on the way home from work?

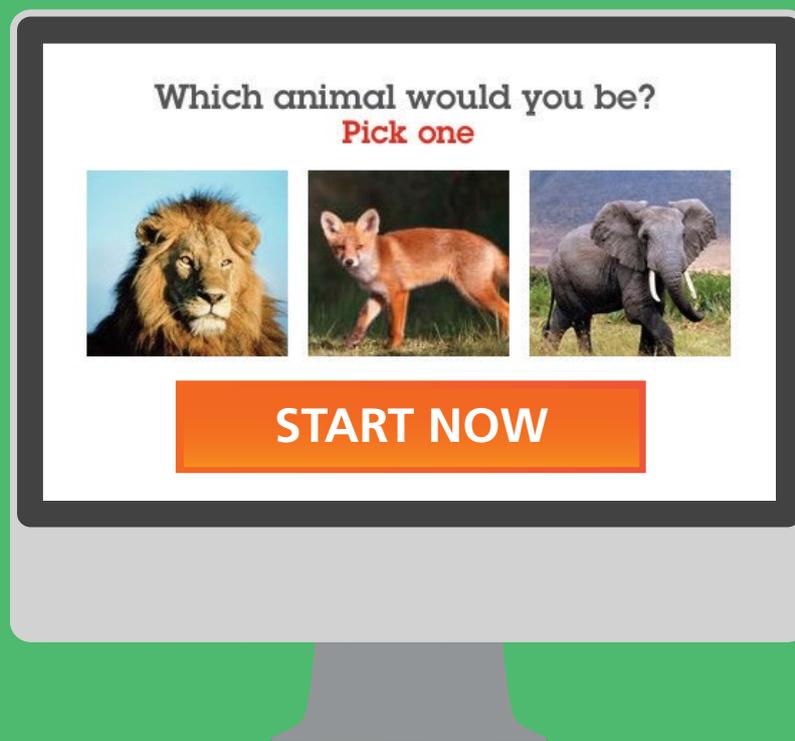
The French have a great tradition called *cinq-a-sept*, which we think everyone should try. It's about reclaiming those lost, early evening hours after work and before you return home.

When you've just given a day to your job, and you're about to give an evening to your partner, take a little time back for yourself in between. You deserve it.

# Continue your journey

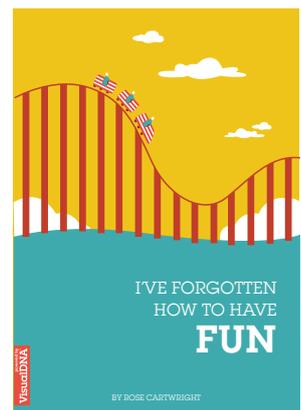
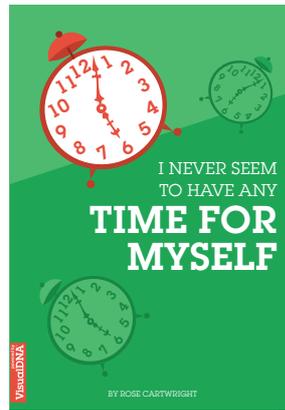
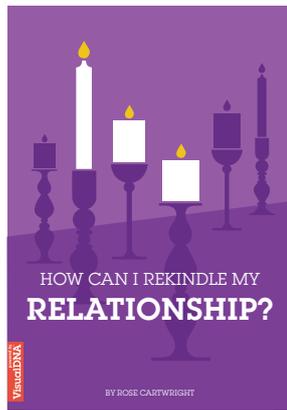
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