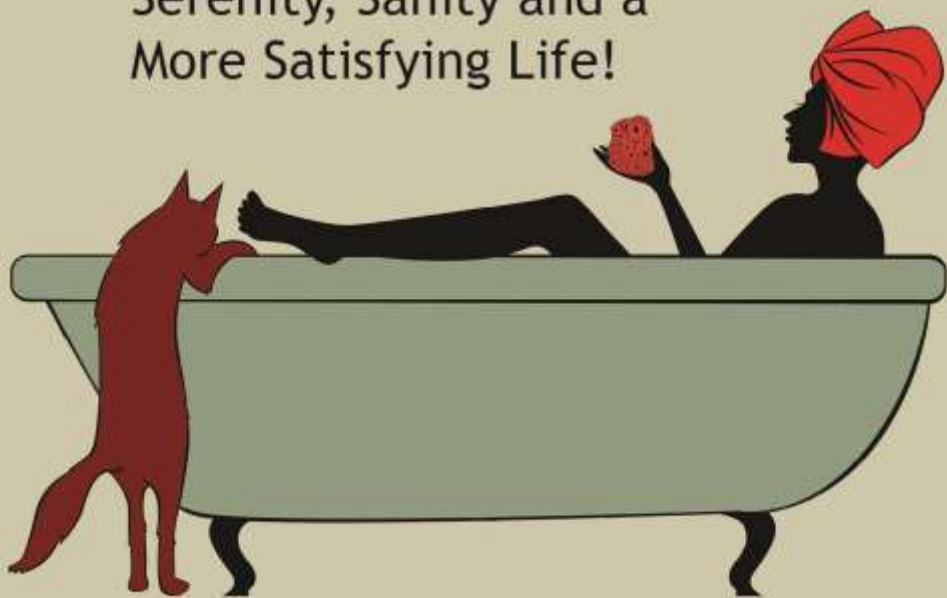


# 40+ Fabulous

Self-Care Practices for  
Serenity, Sanity and a  
More Satisfying Life!



SONDRA WRIGHT

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**SONDRA WRIGHT**

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{ “Don’t compromise yourself; you are all  
you’ve got.” ~Janice Joplin }

This guide is dedicated to a special Facebook fan. I won’t say who, but you know who you are.

It is written on the heels of a blog and a series of posts I had written on the importance of self-care—a concept that is *completely* foreign to many of the women I know and meet. In one post I wrote, “*No one asked me, but my humble opinion is, it’s okay to be a people pleaser, as long as you’re at the top of the list of people to please.*”

The post was a well-received, with many *likes, shares, and comments*. However, there was one response in particular that really awakened me to the self-care crisis

that women are truly in. The post went like this:

*“If someone around me is not happy, I’m not happy which means I run around like crazy until I know EVERYONE is happy.*

*I grew up in a household where the motto was, ‘my way or the highway’. We always had to make sure my dad was never irritated or inconvenienced in any way. During my younger years, we had a lot of family get-togethers, many of which were held in our home, so my sister and I were given duties to help as little hostesses.*

*I later waitressed for a number of years, so again, others' needs came first. Then, I had my first child at age 19 and my second at age 22. All my life, I've been making sure everyone else's' needs came before my own."*

This woman's story is indicative of the very *real* cycle of self-neglect women find themselves in—a cycle that leads to stress, burn out, frustration and resentment. Trust me ladies, I know you're busy, but where do *you* fit in to all of that busyness? Taking care of '*you*' does not mean neglecting everyone else in your life. It simply means adding yourself to the list—preferably in a prominent top five position of people that you are nurturing, loving and caring for. If not, we'll work up to that.

For me, self-care (giving myself permission to sleep late, play hooky, take a walk in the park, read or meditate), is not a luxury *or* a treat. It is a necessity. It's like paying the mortgage, but a lot more fun. Taking time out for myself reduces my stress, relaxes my mind, restores my body, gives me more clarity and even changes my perspective at times. Self-care also builds confidence and self-esteem. When you give attention to your own needs, the message you begin to send to yourself is that you *are* precious, you *are* priceless, you *are* worthy, you deserve to feel good, you deserve to feel amazing and quite frankly, an investment in you is the best investment you'll *ever* make.

*Dear woman, you are precious and deserve the best care possible!* With that in mind, I want to share with you some of my

favorite self-care regimens and show you how I make myself a priority. I think you'll find the majority of these are low cost, low maintenance and simple enough to incorporate into everyday life.

1. Merriam-Webster defines massage as *“a manipulation of tissues (as by rubbing, kneading, or tapping) with the hand or an instrument for therapeutic purposes.”* I define massage as an expression of self-love, designed to rejuvenate the soul. I think I like *my* definition better.
2. Grab a great read. Not for personal development, not for learning new skills, but just for the pure satisfaction of reading. Choose a couple of your favorite magazines, a handful of those gossip tabloids if



you like, or a book that's fun and inspiring.

3. Lock the bathroom door, turn down the lights, add favorite oils to warm running water, and lose yourself in a soothing warm bath.
4. Last spring I was the captain of a "Walk for Life" team at the local Y. There were five or six teams, and prizes were to be awarded in two categories; 1) the most individual miles walked over a six-week period, and, 2) the most combined team miles walked over a six-week period. I headed to the Y every morning, completely focused on the fifty-one laps it would take to walk my goal of three miles.

There was always this same group of retired ladies who came in twos and threes, talking and laughing as they strolled, leisurely and side-by-side, around the indoor track. They were oblivious to the number of laps they were walking—or to the fact that they were in the way of us “*serious*” walkers. They were on teams, but they were in no particular hurry. These ladies were clearly walking for the enjoyment of walking, and, from the hearty laughter on the track, the enjoyment of each other’s company. When this competition was over, I too, would grab a girlfriend and go for a walk.

5. I remember, so vividly, the times my mom would prepare her special T-bone steak, smothered with grilled

onions and melted cheese. It was always a meal for one, prepared some time after everyone was in bed. I was the oldest and hadn't always drifted off to sleep before the aroma came wafting down the hallway and into my bedroom. This was *her* special time and *her* special treat.

Whether it's a glass of wine, a box of chocolates or a nice juicy steak, take a page from my mom's book, and set aside some special time just for you to indulge in your special treat.

6. It's hard to imagine that a force as destructive as fire can also be soothing and calming. For me, sitting still, completely lost in the constant changing flames of a fireplace, is one of my top favorite forms of

relaxation. In fact, I have been known to blast the air conditioner, just so I can enjoy the fireplace.

*Shhh!*

7. Buy yourself a bouquet of flowers, bring them home and arrange them. The best \$14.95 I have ever spent was on a fresh cut arrangement from my local Sam's Club, Costco, or BJ's Club warehouse. Picking out one of these beautiful arrangements just for me, makes me feel grown-up, makes me feel sexy and completely boosts my mood. Have you ever noticed the number of people who look at you and smile, when you're carrying an arrangement of flowers?
8. I've written for a long time, and as a young girl, I kept several notebooks of songs, short stories and poetry.

Whether it's a diary, a gratitude journal, or thoughts and ideas for the future, there's just something so relaxing about putting your thoughts on paper.

9. Confucius said, "*Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.*" I couldn't agree more. Put on some music and dance, dance, dance! *Or*, skip the dance because the music alone will boost your spirit and soothe your mind.
10. Treat yourself to that special item you've been wanting. Do you have a favorite movie you've wanted to add to your collection? A CD you have wanted for ages? A fragrance that you love? You deserve it! *Get it!* But, make sure it's affordable. The last

thing you want is the added stress of buyer's remorse *and* debt.

11. I think I'm addicted to candlelight, but that's okay. There are worse things one can be addicted to, right? Try lighting a few candles to bring calm, relaxation and a sense of comfort to any space.

12. I don't know about you but for me, being surrounded by clutter is stressful. A year ago my home office had declared war on me. It was difficult to work or create in the space because I was so distracted by the chaos. Even worse, the thought of organizing my office was so overwhelming; ignoring it just seemed the better option.

Finally, one day as I assessed the disorganization through a puddle of tears, I devised a plan. I would dedicate thirty minutes a day for an entire week to decluttering that space. Everything I touched had to be given away, thrown away, or put away. The plan itself empowered me and at the end of the week, I was in a space where I felt more relaxed, increased my productivity and had a greater overall sense of well-being.

13. Another way to lift a weight off your shoulders is to clean your closet. Organize clothes and shoes, give away what you don't need or want. Take inventory of new pieces you can purchase to update the look of existing wardrobe pieces, and, the

*pièce de résistance*, add some fragrance to your closet. Clean linen is one of my favorite scents for the closet, but you may like the smell of lavender, citrus, or even dryer sheets. It's totally your choice.

14. There is a little breathing exercise I practice where I close my eyes, inhale slowly and deeply through my nose, and exhale slowly and completely through my mouth. But here's the trick: On the third inhale, I picture the happy, innocent face of my niece. I hold that picture in my imagination and breathe it into my nostrils, and as I exhale, I hold her inside, picturing her arms wrapped around my middle. Do this simple breathing exercise, picturing something or someone you love and



watch your “happy” soar through the roof.

15. Busy moms may think I’ve lost my mind when I recommend spending time with a child, but there’s something absolutely refreshing about it. I love hanging out with my niece, taking my adult hat off and just immersing myself into her world. I love seeing things through her eyes, and allowing my inner child to come out and play.
16. I wrote a blog once about the *Do Too Much Woman*. The *Do Too Much Woman* can show up anywhere—marriages, the workplace, families, friendships, or volunteering in communities. She does her share of the work *and* the share that others are more than

capable of doing for themselves. She would rather do it herself than ask someone else for help. And when it all becomes too much to bear, she will crash and burn. Her efforts have served neither her *nor* those closest to her.

No woman can be everything to everybody. When you're down, out and completely burned out, who will be there to take over for *you*? No one! Because when we insist on doing for others what they could and *should* do for themselves, we stunt their growth, prevent them from growing up and we grow ourselves tired, weary and resentful. Learn the art of saying "*NO!*"

17. The *giving* comes easy. It's learning how to *receive* that many of us have

a problem with. Open your arms and receive the gift of help, receive appreciation, receive a compliment and just smile and say “*Thank You!*”

18. Oh! The indescribable joy I get from “people” watching, because people are so interesting. I like to observe their movements, interactions with other people, attire, laughter, attitudes, the things they do when they’re alone and think no one else is watching. Grab a seat in the park, at the mall, or an outdoor patio downtown and just... *people* watch.
19. Try a midday matinee. Steal away all by yourself, grab a movie of your choosing and popcorn with *extra butter*. *Ahhh* the joy.

20. Exercise, for me personally, does not mean jumping up and down until I'm drenched in perspiration. My preference is stretching. Not only does stretching relieve tension, but it also helps with range of motion, increased flexibility and improved posture. Whether its reflexology, Yoga, Tai Chi, Zumba, or water aerobics, give your mind a respite, your body the gift of movement, and unwind through exercise.

21. Crossword, Seek and Find, Kakuro, and Soduku puzzles give your brain a workout and they're fun to do. Puzzles are great stress busters guaranteed to get your mind off your worries. But, I'm warning you, these guys can be highly addictive.

22. I love my coffee or tea time—curling up on the couch or enjoying the view from outdoors with a steaming cup of coffee or a soothing cup of tea.
23. Reach out to some friends and plan a *girl's night out*. Connect and share so that no one feels alone in their journey. Get up the courage to say, *“Okay guys, here’s something interesting that just happened to me, or with my husband, my mom, or my kids . . .”* Whatever the case may be. Soon after someone else chimes in and says, *“Oh my gosh, I can’t believe it! I’ve been going through the same thing and had no idea anyone else was!”* It opens up this wonderful opportunity to dialogue and share.

24. Paying attention to my hands always gives my self-esteem a little boost. After all, next to the face, the hands are what we use to express ourselves the most. An occasional manicure keeps me and my hands ready to face the world.
25. A pedicure just might be the ultimate in self-care, because when your feet feel good, you feel good all over.
26. You know all those crazy e-vites (electronic e-mail invitations) you get for jewelry parties, cooking parties, makeup parties and spa parties? *Go!* Many of these parties have great hostesses, great food, great games and great giveaways, so accept an invitation to meet new friends, play, laugh, shop, and enjoy.

27. Enjoy a foot soak, once a week in the privacy of your own home, and listen to all twenty-six bones in your feet *purrr* like content baby kittens.
28. What about a Friday or Saturday night home spa treatment? Pay extra attention to your skin with a weekly deep cleansing masque and some pampering body oils.
29. Girls just want to have fun, and get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life! That's what the girl's getaway weekend is all about. This is the perfect opportunity to relax, giggle, shop, have fun and reconnect with the girls!
30. If solo travel is wrong, I don't want to be right. Throwing a bag in the car and taking a road trip, *by myself*,

is the grown and sexy equivalent of running away from home. "*Run, Forrest, Run!*"

31. Oh, how I long to own a couple of horses someday. Until then, every opportunity I get to visit a stable and take a trail ride, I take it. Horseback riding is one of my top five favorite ways to take in scenery and just relax.
32. Remember the game show *Who Want to Be a Millionaire?* Phone a friend.
33. You know, there's just something about the warm soft fur of a living creature that provides immediate stress relief. Just play with a kitten, puppy, or furry animal of choice, and



feel that unconditional love flow back to you ten-fold.

34. I dare you to go tech free for twenty-four hours! Unplugging once a week—no computer, no email, no cell phones—is one of the most liberating things you will ever do. And guess what, the world will still be here when you tune back in the next day.
35. Most of us have at least a dozen places in our own hometown that we've *never* visited, and may not even be aware of. Discover a museum, art gallery, or botanical garden in your own town, and then treat yourself to lunch.
36. Here's a 3-in-1 for you. *Get some sleep!* 1) Ignore the alarm clock,

grab some extra Z's, and try waking up every now and then at the crack of noon. 2) Go to bed an hour early. 3) Take a twenty minute power nap.

37. October, November and December are the months that I typically pay very close attention to the weather forecast. I'm scouting for cool, rainy, fall days so I can schedule my rainy day movie marathon. Some of my favorite rainy day movies include: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Imitation of Life*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Dances with Wolves*, *The Color Purple*, *Ben-Hur*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *Gone with the Wind*.

38. Boy, do I remember the days when I thought anyone wearing loungewear after 9:00 a.m. was just lazy and pathetic. Mama taught me

that when your feet hit the floor in the morning, you make your bed, take a bath and get dressed—regardless if you were leaving the house or not. That was mama’s rule and to do otherwise was just lazy!! I brought that notion with me into adulthood and it was embedded into my mindset. Boy, am I glad to be free of that personal *hang-up*. Because I promise you, there’s no one who appreciates a pajama day more than me.

39. Indulge in a high calorie, low nutrition goodie . . . guilt free. This is also a fabulous way to reward yourself after decluttering a room or cleaning that closet. One of my rewards is the Banana Royale from Baskin Robbins—two scoops of ice

cream topped with banana slices, hot fudge, chopped nuts and whipped cream. I'm getting excited just telling you about it.

40. Take advantage of one of those half-off Living Social house cleaning specials. I've never had anyone clean my house before, but this one is definitely on my list of things to do for myself.
41. There are occasions when I leave my house with one goal in mind, spending an hour or two paying other people compliments. I say *'give what you love to get'*, and who doesn't like to get a compliment? So as you're out and about, look for things in other people to compliment them on; a scarf, shoes, a hairdo, their children. The reaction

you get is often amazing. But the words I give away to make *someone else* feel good always seem to make me feel good too.

42. How much fun is it to pull out the old family photos of buck teeth, big ears, plaid leisure suits and beehives, and take a walk down memory lane?
43. Okay ladies, we all have them, and every now and then we need to get rid of them. Yep, I'm talking about chucking those raggedy, stretched out bloomers in exchange for some new underwear. They can still be bloomers, *if* that's what you like. Just head to the mall and buy yourself some new ones . . . *that fit!*

I hope this was a fun read for you and most importantly, I hope this list has helped you gain a new perspective of self-care. Whatever it takes to make you feel happy, content, uplifted, and at peace . . . *do it!* Be the most important person in your life and take care of you! The most important commitment you can make to anyone you love, is to love *yourself first*. Honoring yourself is never a selfish act.

*“Growing into your future with health and grace and beauty doesn’t have to take all your time. It rather requires a dedication to caring for yourself as if you were rare and precious, which you are, and regarding all life around you as equally so, which it is.”*

*~Victoria Moran*