



The Age of SELF-CARE: PART 2

Tips for forming
a "spa for the soul"

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In Part I of this article in the November/December issue, we introduced V.E.E.T.S. and how it applies to self-care. Here is the conclusion of that article which picks up with Touch and Smell.

T is for Touch

Daily, instructors and trainers help others enhance their kinesthetic awareness. Unfortunately, hectic work schedules often prohibit that they, themselves, “check in” with their own. Classes such as Feldenkrais offer a plethora of tips for instructors to help them learn how to take care of themselves through touch. This author schedules private Feldenkrais lessons with practitioner Valerie Grant (valeriecgrant@hotmail.com) randomly throughout the year to assess breathing, posture and movement patterns. According to Grant, “Feldenkrais lessons promote self-care because they help instructors find greater ease and more efficient mobility for muscles. Patterns of habitual, unconscious muscle engagement lead to strain and injury, and Feldenkrais helps us discover our imbalances and learn to make movement choices that can prevent these parasitic patterns.”

Homework Suggestion:

If engaging a Feldenkrais practitioner is not possible for you, use touch to relax the body by practicing myofascial release. This is a gradual to deep self-massage of muscle fascia and tissue that gets over-worked as we teach and train. Start with a self-massage for five minutes on each foot. If you do not know how to massage the feet, just start with gentle squeezes all over the foot area for two minutes per foot. If possible, work up to using a foam ball or foam roller (available at power-systems.com) to massage muscles, release bands of collagen and re-hydrate the muscles. For more information on this technique, consult meltmethod.com.

Smell

Oftentimes in the gym instructors face less-than-pleasant smells: gym bags loaded with dirty clothes, group fitness studios, chlorinated pool areas and even locker rooms. Subconsciously via the sympathetic nervous system, the brain sends messages to the lungs to inhale and exhale less deeply to avoid pungent odors.

Donna Farhi, in *The Breathing Book*, reports that such shallow breathing can prevent the body from recovering sufficiently between classes because cells do not receive the proper amounts of oxygen they need to carry nutrients for repair. Consequently, overuse injuries, fatigue and even insomnia can occur.

Homework Suggestion:

Taking just a few steps to promote deep, conscious breathing (aromatherapy) before classes can heighten one's recovery between workouts. The more pleasant the smell, the stronger the parasympathetic nervous system's role to lengthen the inhalation and exhalation response. Examples of aromatherapy to induce a deeper breath response for instructors and trainers include:

- Lighting an aromatherapy candle when checking e-mail at a desk area
- Placing an aromatherapy sachet into a backpack or gym bag
- Getting an ionizer for the car to neutralize smells and generate that “after-the-rain” fresh smell
- Creating an aromatherapy spray made of appropriate essential oils in a base of green tea for spraying on the chest and wrists between classes when taking a full shower isn't possible
- Adding a few drops of appropriate essential oils to after-shower moisturizing lotion or oil.

Learning to practice self-care is crucial for today's versatile instructor and trainer. Fitness professionals should resist the tendency to overlook their own health. Instead, let's rest as hard as we train. The homework suggestions in this article outline practical, quick, yet effective techniques for each of the five senses to assist instructors and trainers to stay healthy while giving so much service to others. AF

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