



THE Witch's BOOK OF *Self-Care*

Magical Ways to
Pamper, Soothe, and
Care for Your
Body and Spirit



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The Green Witch

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This one is for Ceri and Megan, who yell at me a lot in a caring way to not push myself beyond my limits and to stop feeling guilty for needing breaks. Back at you, ladies. I couldn't do this without you. Ice cream and spinning wheels forever.



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Contents

Introduction.....	7
<i>Chapter 1: Self-Care and Magic</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Chapter 2: Mental and Emotional Self-Care</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Physical Self-Care</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Chapter 4: Spiritual Self-Care.....</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Chapter 5: Household Self-Care....</i>	<i>191</i>
Bibliography.....	217
Index.....	219



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Introduction

At its most basic, engaging in self-care is about self-respect. Self-care is all about taking care of yourself, making that stand and declaring that, yes, you are important, you do matter. Simple self-care is part of your efforts to be the best person you can be—an idea that resonates in magic as well. Magic is an ideal partner for self-care: one of magic's main focuses is healing—healing of the self, healing of the earth, healing of humanity and nature. In this sense, magic and self-care go hand in hand.

The Witch's Book of Self-Care helps you explore ways to reconnect with yourself, make time for yourself, learn how to experience moments in your day mindfully, and to honor yourself and your spiritual and emotional health. Through magical self-care you will call upon the energies of natural objects such as herbs, stones, and the elements to care for yourself spiritually. Inside these pages you'll discover activities on finding balance, recharging, examining self-destructive behavior and transforming it into a healthier behavior, as well as meditations designed to help you get in touch with yourself again, spiritually and otherwise.

Taking care of your energy, your emotional health, your physical health, and your mental health are all essential undertakings—and can all be enhanced with magic. Being your best self is part of what makes the world a better place. This book can be that first step toward exploring how magic and self-care can partner to support you in your efforts to become the best version of yourself that you can be.



Chapter 1

Self-Care and Magic

Self-care is a buzzword these days. But like media representations of magic, representations of self-care can be confusing. What exactly constitutes self-care? Is getting a mani-pedi or a new handbag actually self-care, and if not, what is? Simply put, self-care is any activity that you do deliberately to take care of your mental, emotional, or physical health.

Magic dovetails perfectly with the concept of self-care because magic is about listening to what's inside you and the messages the Divine and nature have for you. Being in the moment in this way opens you up to an intimate world of information that is supportive of your well-being. Magic and self-care make excellent partners on the road to leading a balanced, fulfilling life.

This chapter will explore not only what self-care is and some of the damaging self-care stereotypes, it will also give you some background on the magical techniques that you will use and explore in the later chapters of this book.

The Goals of Self-Care

The goals of self-care are simple:

- ♦ Healthy mind
- ♦ Healthy spirit
- ♦ Healthy body

The point of self-care isn't just about giving yourself a break. It's about becoming skilled at identifying your needs by listening to your mind, body, and spirit. And not just long-term needs, but also immediate needs, the needs you have at this very moment.

How hard can it be to listen to yourself? Particularly difficult, apparently, because a staggering percentage of the population has difficulty sleeping, anxiety issues, depression, and an ongoing feeling of failure.

Taking care of yourself is more than inputting food and making sure you have a roof over your head. It means treating yourself with the kindness you extend to everyone around you. It means supporting yourself the way you support people who are dear to you.

Women in particular struggle with this self-care issue, although it's not a woman-exclusive problem. Women are socialized to care for the people around them by denying or minimizing their own needs. This leads to an erasure of self-worth and a constant putting-off of rejuvenation or addressing the woman's own needs for support and nurturing. This in turn can lead to anger and resentment.

Self-care means considering yourself a worthwhile person and presenting yourself as valuable, capable, and deserving. In other words, self-care seeks to redress an imbalance that develops when you don't take proper care of yourself, whether by inattention or by choice.

Self-care also doesn't have to involve big, splashy undertakings. In fact, self-care works better if you do it in regular small doses, because it helps keep you from reaching a level where you are in desperate

need of something big to make an impact on how you feel. This sort of incremental self-care is also beneficial because small gestures don't take a lot of time, so there is less of a sense of stealing time from other responsibilities or other people. It can help avoid the sense of selfishness that sometimes accompanies self-care activities.

Often selfishness is at the root of self-care stereotypes. Magical work is excellently poised to fight this feeling, because it generally works on an unseen, inner level where others cannot judge.

Magic As Self-Care

One of magic's main focuses is healing—healing of the self, healing of the earth, healing of humanity and nature. In this sense, magic and self-care go hand in hand. Self-care is a way to maintain your health, heal your spirit, and maintain or optimize your emotional, mental, and physical health. Magic helps with self-empowerment and exerting control over your life, encouraging a focus on yourself as the best person you can be. These are all things that resonate well with the general goal of self-care.

The practice of magic seeks to establish or balance connection between an individual and the environment. If a spiritual aspect is added, then magic also seeks to balance or maintain the connection between the individual and the Divine.

Incremental Self-Care

There's a tendency for people to say, "Oh, just exercise; your depression will vanish" or "Take up yoga and you'll be a much better person spiritually!"

That's not how self-care works. Self-care is a complicated interwoven combination of hundreds of small acts and an attitude shift. Using just one of the rituals, spells, or practices in this book is not going to solve your problems. But each will make you feel a little better and hopefully help you see that you are worthy of self-care and deserve to take the time and attention you need. Even though it may not make your fatigue vanish completely, taking care of yourself is still a valuable thing. Cleaning up a room won't eliminate your anxiety, but it will make the atmosphere healthier and more comfortable to be in, and that's important.

Fighting the Stereotypes of Self-Care

The media pushes self-care "solutions" in the form of spa days and retail therapy. It's frustrating, because these solutions assume that you are of a certain class with certain options available to you. They assume that you have disposable income; they assume that you actively desire these things and deny yourself for some reason; and they assume that you have the time to engage in these activities, even as a treat.

These media suggestions also assume that engaging in these kinds of activities will fill a gap in your life, implying that you are somehow not normal if engaging in one doesn't fill the void in your heart. Take

courage! The media view of self-care does not have to align with your sense of self-care...and, in fact, it's probably healthier if it doesn't.

Self-Care Guilt

Another stereotype of self-care is of someone lazily lounging on a sofa eating chocolate and ignoring chores. This stereotype is harmful in that it suggests taking a few minutes to yourself between tasks is letting an unspecified "everyone" down in some way. It implies that if you're not wholly immersed in handling things, you are failing somehow. This is one of the most harmful stereotypes associated with self-care, because you are being told that you aren't taking things seriously enough if you aren't always working for the benefit of someone other than yourself. It tells you that if you take a moment or two for yourself, you should feel guilty.

While it can be therapeutic to put something off, procrastination or ignoring a problem isn't self-care; in fact, it's the opposite. Ignoring a problem just makes it more of a problem. Self-care involves scheduling things so that they don't reach problem status and includes being kind to your future self by not leaving her a mess to handle.

Releasing Guilt

So often we carry around our guilt and let it fester within us. This is not healthy! Releasing guilt can be very helpful in learning to prioritize self-care. Use the following ritual to let go of some of your guilt and allow yourself to feel the burden of it lifting away from you.

Ritual to Release Guilt

This is a burning ritual in which you burn the thing you are trying to banish or release. This type of ritual can be very therapeutic when you are trying to process painful memories or work through heavy emotions. You may have to do this ritual semiregularly if you tend to feel guilty about different things, or if your guilt about a specific thing pops up again and again. Do it as often as you feel you need to.

This ritual calls for grounding, centering, and optionally casting a circle; if you're not already familiar with these techniques, see the instructions later in this chapter.

What You Need:

- ♦ Trivet or hot pad
- ♦ Fireproof/heatproof container
- ♦ Frankincense incense and a censer
- ♦ White candle and candleholder
- ♦ Matches or lighter
- ♦ Paper
- ♦ Pen or pencil

What to Do:

1. Center and ground. Cast a circle if you feel you need one.
2. Place the trivet or hot pad and the heatproof container on top of it next to the incense and candle.
3. Light the frankincense incense. Light the candle.
4. Sit with your eyes closed and think about your sense of guilt. What is it related to? What triggers it? Can you pinpoint what you feel guilty for? There may be associated feelings, such as resentment, sadness, shame, or anger.
5. When you're ready, write these things on the paper.

6. Fold the paper in half or quarters to fit the heatproof container. Hold the paper and say:

I release this guilt to the universe.

I invite peace and serenity to take its place.

Open my heart to the positive energy of this lesson

And support me as I learn to care for myself freely.

Thank you for your many blessings.

7. Touch the corner of the paper to the flame of the candle. When the paper catches, place it in the heatproof container and allow it to burn to ash. Allow the incense and candle to burn out.
 8. Later, take the ash of the paper and either dispose of it under running water outdoors, or allow the wind to take it.
-

Hygge and Self-Care

Hygge is a Danish concept that underlines the importance of focusing on the enjoyment of the moment. It's about being present and allowing yourself the time and space to acknowledge a feeling or what's happening at the present moment.

Hygge came about as a result of Danes needing a way to cope emotionally and spiritually with long, cold, dark winters. It celebrates small things that make life worthwhile, such as cups of tea, good books, comfortable spaces, the feeling of security and coziness, home-cooked food, and the company of friends. It rests on the idea of a slow-moving, low-stress, low-commercial-consumption life.

Hygge is a concept that fits almost seamlessly into magical practice. The practice of magic strives for the same sort of serenity that hygge does. Meditation and slowing down to be in the moment, aware and acknowledging your authentic self, is very much at the heart of magic work. Magic looks to improve yourself, to strengthen yourself, and to celebrate yourself.

Hygge suggests that the living of your life can be an art form, which is an excellent way to look at self-care. It's not about flashiness; it's about comfort and expression. It's about creating a special moment, not special in the out-of-the-ordinary sense, but in the recognition that if you pause and allow yourself to acknowledge and connect with that moment, however small, you will realize that every moment can be special just because it's yours and you've recognized it as such.

Part of self-care is allowing yourself the permission to have those moments and to enjoy them. You are encouraged to pause and acknowledge the moment, whether it is good or bad. That moment of acknowledgment reinforces the idea that you are worth the time. It also validates your feelings, which can reduce overall stress. Rather than ignoring your feelings in a mad dash to drive forward, those moments of acknowledging yourself without judgment provide a healthy way to reassure your subconscious that it is allowed to have moods. It doesn't have to be "up" or "on" all the time. In fact, it shouldn't be. Everyone and everything needs downtime.

The Importance of Being Authentic

At its heart, the idea of being authentic means:

- ♦ Figuring out who you are
- ♦ Accepting yourself
- ♦ Being true to yourself

Sound easy? Maybe not.

Often the hustle and bustle of daily life is a way to keep ourselves distracted and busy so that we don't pause and look at ourselves and see who we really are. Pausing to take a good look at yourself can be intimidating. What if you aren't the great person you think you are?

Sometimes self-care is hard because it means facing things you'd rather pretend aren't there. Self-examination is uncomfortable. It requires a level of honesty that you may not feel prepared to handle. You may fear admitting that you have been the one sabotaging yourself, knowingly or unknowingly, or you may be terrified of acknowledging that you need to crack down on your self-discipline in order to be your best self. Self-care means recognizing that you're weak in some areas. It means you have more agency and control over your life than you may be comfortable accepting.

But just think: if you admit you have weak areas, you know what to work on, and you know what parts of you need more love and nurturing. If you accept responsibility for being your best self, then you can make better decisions regarding your self-care.

Try this affirmation: *"I honor my true self."*

Living as your authentic self means following a very individual path. No one else can live quite like you. It's a unique pursuit. Yes, it is hard to isolate your own values and sometimes harder to live according to them when it might be a lot easier to remain ignorant and pretend that you're fine. But caring for an inauthentic self is like filling a leaky bucket. You can't ever fill it, because it's not complete. Self-care means valuing all the various parts of you, not just some of them (yes, even the parts that still need work). If you pretend to be someone you're not, how can you ever be truly happy? If you're not being authentic, how can you have compassion for yourself?

Living authentically might not be easy, but it's rewarding. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- ♦ Balance what you feel and/or need against your actions.
- ♦ Making value-based choices will be healthier in the long run than making choices based on convenience or popular opinion.
- ♦ Advocate for yourself and your needs or wants.
- ♦ Don't let yourself be driven by a need to be approved of or liked by others. Approval is a powerful drug, but being happy with your value-based choices is healthier for your spirit and sense of self.

Being openly authentic can be intimidating. What if you embrace yourself as you truly are, weaknesses and flaws and all...only to be rejected by other people? Fear is a powerful deterrent. Fear of failure, of rejection, or of loneliness can combine with the fear of missing out, creating a tangle of anxiety and a sense of not being in control of anything. Remember, though, living authentically will build your sense of confidence and strength, which will in turn show in your personal energy.

Author Brené Brown talks about cultivating the ability to be imperfect in *The Gifts of Imperfection*. Accepting that you are imperfect and still worth caring for is a valuable practice in your self-care toolbox.

As much as self-examination can be scary, ignoring it just creates a different kind of stress—avoidable stress, at that. Make the choice to work through the stress and engage in self-reflection instead of being at the mercy of the stress that rises from procrastinating or ignoring something. Be in control. (Check out the exercise Authenticity: A Spell to Help Recognize the Real You, in Chapter 2.)

Magical Techniques for Self-Care

This book proposes a variety of magical techniques to use in your practice of self-care. Most of them are easy and accessible, and others ask for minor purchases of herbs or stones. Stones don't need to be huge; even a small stone possesses natural energy that you can draw on to help support your own. Most of the herbs can be found in a grocery store. Some can be used in oil form. Essential oils may seem expensive, but they are concentrated and last a long time with proper storage away from light. Here are some of the magical techniques you will explore throughout this book.

Creative Visualization

Were you called out for daydreaming or having an overactive imagination as a child? Creative visualization is a technique that uses your powers of imagination and concentration to create an image of the reality you're working for. It's more focused than daydreaming

and requires you to create what you're visualizing with care. Essentially, by visualizing a potential situation and lending it energy, you're fueling it and giving it more power.

Creative visualization also works in a negative way. This is why you need to catch yourself in the act if your mind goes off on a tangent imagining something terrible. You don't want to give a negative outcome any more power or fuel than it already possesses.

Meditation

Meditation offers your mind a break by allowing it to disengage from the ongoing commotion of the world around you. It has physical benefits, such as slowing heart rate and lowering blood pressure. Mentally, it improves concentration and counters stress, depression, and anxiety, as well as fighting recursive negative thinking. Emotionally, meditation encourages self-acceptance and optimism. Spiritually, it fosters calm, serenity, and a sense of peace and harmony with the universe.

The types of meditation explored in this book include mindfulness meditation and breathing meditation, both very simple practices that encourage self-care.

Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises allow you to pay attention to what is otherwise an autonomous function. For an autonomous function, it's impressive how much improvement you can realize with a bit of attention to the process!

By taking control of your breathing, you can affect the depth and rhythm of your intake and release of oxygen. In turn, that can benefit your brain function, your heart rate, the health of your body in general, and more. Breathing exercises can also do double duty as meditation.

Herbal Magic

What's the difference between herbal magic and herbalism? Herbalism works on a medicinal level. Magic works with the energies of the plant. The two are not mutually exclusive. For example, there are tea recipes in this book that incorporate both herbal magic and medicinal herbalism. Mainly, however, the energies of flowers, shrubs, herbs, and trees are used to support and encourage self-care magically as opposed to medicinally for the physical body.

Herbal magic can be used in aromatherapy, incense, oils, pot-pourri, sachets, powders, charms, and as a supportive magical technique for other kinds of magic.

Candle Magic

Apart from candles providing an excellent way to create a welcoming atmosphere, candle magic is simple and serene. It can be as simple as lighting a candle and enjoying the beauty of the flame and the scent, or it can be more complicated, involving carving words into the candle or drilling holes in the wax, which you then fill with herbs and/or oils. Candles provide an easy way to engage in self-care; you don't need to invest in expensive ones, although seeking out the cheapest options often means you might end up with poorly made candles that burn unevenly, smoke, and leave messy black soot on the walls.

You can also purchase your own ingredients and supplies and enjoy rolling, dipping, or pouring your own candles, which allows you to add powdered dried herbs and oils to the candles as they are being made.

Here are some tips for candles:

- ♦ Buy a box of any size of Mason jars (or grab them when you see them at thrift stores) and use them as candleholders, either for tea lights or pillars. Tie a bit of ribbon or raffia around each jar for rustic charm. (Make sure the ribbon or raffia isn't too close to the top of the jar so it's safe from the flame.) Swap the colors of ribbons or raffia as the seasons change, if you like.
- ♦ Grease the inside of the bottom of the jar with petroleum jelly or olive oil to help prevent the candle from sticking to the bottom once it has finished burning.
- ♦ Always use a proper candle snuffer to put out the flame instead of trying to blow the flame out to avoid spattering wax.
- ♦ Look for soy candles or ones with a high percentage of beeswax. Not only do they burn more cleanly, they also release fewer harmful chemicals into the air and are likely to be made under better working conditions.
- ♦ Practice sensible fire safety around candles. Don't leave them unattended, and make sure there is nothing flammable around them.