Reality: Work and life can get busy to the point of overwhelming. Strong individuals who make self-care a priority often experience a peace and confidence to keep moving in busy demands because they are taking care of themselves in the process.

Consider exploring these self-care strategies to find the one or ones that help you stay healthy during times of stress:

1. **Gratitude Journal** – positive psychological impact of physically writing down gratitude items)

* Plan to write in your gratitude journal every day for at least 5 minutes. Writing at night helps you include things that you are grateful for from that day (and prepares your mind for sleep).
* Write as many things as you want in your journal.
* Your gratitude journal doesn’t have to be deep. What you are thankful for can be as simple as “family” or “the new book or movie I recently enjoyed” or “this morning’s breakfast.” What you are grateful for will differ from everyone else.
* On days you are feeling stressed, read over your gratitude journal. It’s a great way to recalibrate your perspective.
* Research shows it positive impacts the chemistry in your brain so you can sleep better.

1. **Encouragement File**

* Every time someone sends you something that encourages you (an email, a blog comment, a DM, a card, a note), put it in that file.   Often it’s a thank you for something you said or did, a short message of encouragement, and sometimes it’s a life-change story.
* Here’s why: This visible reference is important for the days you are discouraged.
* The file can be electronic (a file folder you save items to) but also consider creating a physical folder – the psychological gift of holding a card, ex is something you can touch on those tough days.
* Key – your Gratitude Journal represents your thoughts; the Encouragement File represents words from others. Your spirit needs both.

1. **Develop a Daily Routine**

* Creating a regular cadence each day is an important way to build a focused approach to the day – this routine may include any/all of the following:
  1. Meditation / Prayer – spiritual centering; focus
  2. Reflection – successions/lessons learned
  3. Preparation for the Day – main goals; task list; conversation planning

1. **Exercise**

* When stress affects the brain, with its many nerve connections, the rest of the body feels the impact as well. So it stands to reason that if your body feels better, so does your mind. Exercise and other physical activity produce endorphins—chemicals in the brain that act as natural painkillers—and also improve the ability to sleep, which in turn reduces stress.
* Movement doesn’t have to be extreme; but some form of exercise (a 10 minute walk, etc) impacts the chemistry in your brain.
* Meditation, acupuncture, massage therapy, even breathing deeply can cause your body to produce endorphins.

1. **Light a Candle**

* Using essential oils or burning a scented candle may help reduce your feelings of stress and anxiety.
* Some of the most calming scents include: Lavender, Rose, Frankincense, Sandalwood, Orange or orange blossom, and Geranium.

1. **Reduce Your Caffeine Intake**

* Caffeine is a stimulant and high doses can increase anxiety even though it provides a boost of energy.
* Consider a 1:1 water/caffeine balance. For every cup of coffee (or caffeine beverage) you drink; you must drink 8 oz of water.

1. **Explore Hobbies**

* Research shows that when you explore a hobby (of any kind), the attention required to learn shifts brain chemistry
* Devoting carved out time (one night a week, etc) to a different interest from work allows you brain to create new pathways, which in turn reduce stress-inducing hormones
* Hobbies may be creative, social, athletic and more – each provides a different type of release

1. **Diet**

* All carbs prompt the brain to make more serotonin. For a steady supply of this feel-good chemical, it's best to eat complex carbs, which take longer to digest. Good choices include whole-grain breads, pastas, and breakfast cereals, including old-fashioned oatmeal. Complex carbs can also help you feel balanced by stabilizing blood sugar levels.
* Oranges and other vitamin C filled fruits can curb levels of stress hormones while strengthening the immune system.
* Spinach - Too little magnesium may trigger headaches and fatigue, compounding the effects of stress. One cup of spinach helps you stock back up on magnesium. Don't like spinach? Other green, leafy vegetables are good magnesium sources. Or try some cooked soybeans or a fillet of salmon, also high in magnesium.
* To keep stress in check, make friends with naturally fatty fish. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish such as salmon and tuna, can prevent surges in stress hormones and may help protect against heart disease, depression
* Pistachios, as well as other nuts and seeds, are good sources of healthy fats. Eating a handful of pistachios, walnuts, or almonds every day may help lower your cholesterol, ease inflammation in your heart's arteries, make diabetes less likely, and protect you against the effects of stress. Don't overdo it, though: Nuts are rich in calories.
* Avocados - One of the best ways to reduce high blood pressure is to get enough potassium, and half an avocado has more potassium than a medium-sized banana.
* Crunchy raw vegetables can help ease stress in a purely mechanical way. Munching celery or carrot sticks helps release a clenched jaw, and that can ward off tension.

1. **Sleep**

* Have a nightly routine – this tells your brain it’s time to wind down.
* Try to avoid any screen time (tv, phones, etc) at least 1 hour before going to bed. This allows the brain time to process the endorphins secreted when viewing information.

1. **Be Okay to Not Be Okay**

* Give yourself permission to have days that you don’t feel 100% - “permission” impacts our brain’s tendency to think about the feelings of over-extension and guilt
* Let emotions out – scream, cry, sweat, dance, ride with wind in your hair and sing loudly, etc.
* Practice a willingness to be vulnerable and tell someone safe about your current struggle

1. **Talk to a Professional**

* Be willing to seek the perspective of a professional who specializes in therapy around stress, life / balance, self care, etc. to ensure mental stress is not manifesting itself into physical illness
* Consider this step as an investment in long-term wellness and sustainability
* Explore possible resources supported by your company’s as some provide these services as benefits to employees.