

Make sure your wellness plan includes immediate, long-term self-care strategies

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Editor's note: *The December column discussed the benefits and challenges of building an individualized wellness plan, <http://bit.ly/2OntvMc>. This column explores how pediatricians can promote self-care in a wellness plan.*

We may talk with our patients and families about self-care but have a hard time taking our own advice. Taking care of ourselves should be a priority not only because it affects the quality of care we offer children and their families but also because it supports our ability to thrive in medicine and cultivates joy in life.

A wellness plan should include self-care strategies for immediate and long-term situations that will help address the challenges inherent in health care. During the workday, ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do or change right now that will make this situation better?" To maintain the joy and passion of practicing pediatrics, develop healthy life habits and identify activities that can become a regular part of your self-care wellness plan.

Your self-care plan should address:

- **Physical and mental health.** When was your last doctor's visit or recommended health screening? When and where will you address any unmet health needs/recommendations? Make sure you have a primary care provider, do not work when ill, and seek medical care and mental health assistance when needed.
- **Nourishment.** Physicians often struggle to eat or drink properly during work hours, despite research demonstrating an association between workplace nutrition and cognition. For those short on time or with limited access to healthy foods, Natalie D. Muth, M.D., M.P.H., R.D.N., FAAP, chair of the AAP Section on Obesity Executive Committee, offers tips that can improve nutrition as well as physical and mental health, <https://downloads.aap.org/DOCHW/NourishingOurselves.pdf>.
- **Rest and sleep.** Keep a regular bedtime routine, minimize distractions and try to get at least seven hours of sleep daily. Try to log off computers or email an hour before you hope to go to sleep.
- **Relaxation, vacations.** Schedule time to unwind. Spend time in nature. Take a vacation. Put it on your calendar and in your wellness plan. Create boundaries with your practice, staff and administrators for checking emails or messages while on vacation.
- **Hobbies.** Plan time each month to enjoy a favorite hobby or start a new one like music, dance, sports, yoga, gardening, photography or crafts. Hopefully, you find joy in pediatrics, but it should not be the only activity that brings you joy.
- **Time for partner, family, friends.** Healthy relationships increase oxytocin, promoting connection, trust, rapport and bonding. Add time each week in your wellness plan to connect with family, friends or loved ones.
- **Mentorship.** Beyond creating good leaders, effective mentorship has many benefits for mentees, mentors and their institutions. Literature supports mentorship as a strategy to improve job satisfaction and productivity, facilitate personal growth and career satisfaction, and lessen risk of compassion fatigue and burnout.

Dr. Brown is a member of the AAP Wellness Advisory Group.

Resources

- [AAP Pediatrician Wellness portal](#)
- [Developing a Wellness Learning Plan](#)
- [Additional Member Health & Wellness columns](#)

