

## 8 Tips for Restorative Self-Care Following a High-Stress Work Period

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Whether you've just completed a demanding humanitarian mission, survived the chaos of an auditing period, or navigated the intensity of a budgeting season, you may feel like you've been operating in "survival mode" until the dust settles. While meeting deadlines and pushing through challenging circumstances is part of many high-stress professions, what happens once the stressful period is over is equally important.

It's easy to shift back into your regular routine without pausing, reflecting, and restoring. However, skipping restorative self-care after intense work periods can lead to burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and other negative consequences. Practicing intentional, values-based self-care can help mitigate these risks and promote long-term well-being.

Here are eight practical tips for restorative self-care to help you reset and recover after a high-stress work period:

### 1. Pause and Reflect

After a high-stress period, reflect on what you've been through. Reflect on both big and small successes—acknowledge your hard work, resilience, and any personal growth. This self-reflection allows you to connect with your values and find meaning in your work, which helps foster a sense of purpose and emotional renewal.

**Tip:** Journaling can be a powerful tool here. Write about what went well, what was challenging, and how you overcame those challenges. This can create space for personal insights and help you transition from "survival mode."

### 2. Reconnect with Your Values

During stressful work periods, it's easy to lose sight of why you do what you do. Restorative self-care is an opportunity to reconnect with your core values—the

principles that guide your life and work. Whether it's service, compassion, integrity, or growth, anchoring yourself in these values can provide grounding and direction as you recover.

**Tip:** Consider engaging in activities that align with your values, such as volunteering, spending time with loved ones, or investing in personal development. These actions can help restore balance and reinforce what matters most to you.

### 3. Be Compassionate with Yourself

It's common to feel exhausted or even frustrated after a demanding work period. Instead of pushing yourself too hard right away, practice self-compassion. Understand that it's okay to take a step back, rest, and recharge. Treat yourself with the same kindness and care you would offer a colleague or friend in a similar situation.

**Tip:** Remind yourself that you don't need everything figured out immediately. Take things one step at a time and allow yourself grace in the process of recovery.

### 4. Create Space for Rest and Relaxation

Once the high-stress period ends, prioritize genuine rest. This could mean taking a few days off, engaging in activities you enjoy, or simply slowing down your pace. Allowing yourself to rest is crucial for both physical and mental recovery.

**Tip:** Plan restful activities that nourish you, whether that's a short vacation, an afternoon walk in nature, or a relaxing evening with a good book. Aim to balance rest with intentional downtime to recharge your energy levels.

### 5. Engage in Physical Movement

Stress often manifests physically, whether through muscle tension, fatigue, or disrupted sleep. Gentle physical movement, such as yoga, stretching, or walking, can help your body release built-up tension and restore your overall sense of well-being.

**Tip:** Even short bursts of physical activity can make a big difference. Consider incorporating mindfulness practices such as yoga to connect movement with relaxation and emotional balance.

## 6. Reconnect with Your Support Network

High-stress periods often limit time spent with friends, family, or supportive colleagues. After the stress subsides, make time to reconnect with your support network. Sharing your experiences and receiving emotional support can be incredibly restorative.

**Tip:** Whether it's a coffee catch-up with a friend, a family dinner, or a call with a mentor, intentionally rebuilding those social connections is a key part of your recovery. These connections remind you that you're not alone in your challenges.

## 7. Focus on Small Wins

Post-stress recovery is a process, and celebrating small wins can be a powerful motivator. Whether it's returning to a favorite hobby, regaining a sense of routine, or accomplishing small tasks, recognizing these achievements fosters a positive mindset and prevents the feeling of being overwhelmed.

**Tip:** Set realistic, manageable goals for your recovery. It could be something as simple as decluttering your workspace or cooking a healthy meal. Celebrate each step forward as you move back toward equilibrium.

## 8. Set Boundaries for Future Stressful Periods

Finally, take the time to reflect on how you can better protect your well-being during future high-stress periods. Setting boundaries and practicing self-care while you're in the midst of these times can make recovery afterward easier and more effective.

**Tip:** Moving forward, schedule regular self-care activities even during stressful work periods. Whether it's committing to short breaks, mindful breathing, or ensuring you get enough sleep, small steps toward self-care during intense times can help prevent long-term burnout.

## Why Values-Based Restorative Self-Care Matters

Restorative self-care, especially when grounded in your core values, is more than just taking time off—it's an intentional practice that fosters resilience, helps mitigate burnout, and protects against compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma. By



reconnecting with your values and treating yourself with compassion, you create a buffer that helps you recover and prepares you for future challenges with a clearer mindset and renewed energy.

Remember, self-care is a crucial investment in your long-term well-being and professional sustainability. By incorporating these restorative practices after high-stress periods, you can emerge more centered, resilient, and ready to face whatever comes next.