



## **NO MORE EXCUSES: Redefining SELF-CARE as a Core Value**

**By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.**

During this past winter it was not uncommon to hear patients tell me that it was too cold to exercise. They promised when the weather improved they will exercise to restore their health. Upon the arrival of spring, their excuse is 'busyness', stress or hot weather. Their excuses contribute to their ill health. When it comes to healthy or clean eating, many patients tell me that their reason for not eating clean is their children's refusal to eat the foods that foster health. They justify their unhealthy choices and lack of self-care with excuses. We are ultimately responsible for our and our children's well-being. Our healthy or unhealthy choices imprint and mentor our children in how they will live and play a critical role in their health and illness.

The epidemic of ADD and ADHD that is upon us is partly due to our malaise for not wanting to be conscious of what ingredients in our foods cause illness, both physical and mental. Numerous studies have shown associations between ADD/ADHD and processed foods containing sugar, food colorings and caffeine. Over the past two decades, these foods have led to an epidemic of chronic illnesses never before seen to this high a degree in our history. Adults have a misconception that cooking wholesome food takes too much time, that stopping at a fast food restaurant or zapping a ready-made processed frozen dinner in the microwave constitutes a nutritionally sound meal. Cooking wholesome foods is not only essential for our health it is the most efficient way to reduce health care costs. It brings our families together around the dinner table and can even heal the loneliness and isolation that plagues our society today. A small act like this can restore and revitalize our family's health, reduce stress and nurture intimacy. In all other parts of the world (except ours) food is known to be central to health. We need to redefine health from intrinsically: food, exercise and self-care are all forms of medicine, and are the only way we can heal our lives. Locally grown, organic, clean foods are readily available in our society. They are rich in antioxidants and free of pesticides and chemicals that cause most of our diseases today. They need to become our primary method for restoring our health and preventing illness.

We have all the healthcare data, cost savings research and scientific reasons that self-care areas lowers the incidence of illness and reduces health care costs. Rather than waiting for an external fix to remedy the runaway costs of health care, we can choose healthy lifestyles and reduce our use of the modern health care system. This system is designed for 'damage control' that occurs as a result of our poor lifestyle choices. Damage control or sick-care is frightening and expensive and can decrease our mortality but it does so at the cost of our quality of life. Conscious self-care reduces our chances of needing sick-care. Consumers drive the market. Healthy consumers can reduce the cost of health care. This will significantly help our country's economy.

We are all responsible for our choices. Our choices affect the health of our country. We need to make self-care a core value and nurture our health without any more excuses. Ultimately, we are what we eat and our health and vitality is directly dependent upon how we choose to live each day. Making self-care a priority is a choice that will elevate our self-worth, restore health to our families and help our country's economy. We can no longer make excuses to not take care of ourselves. The quality of our life depends on this.

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