

Step three: 10 ways to nourish your inner self

We're often taught that other people's needs are most important – but should we put self-care first?

By looking after your needs, you'll improve your relationships, says Cheryl Richardson. In her controversial book, *The Art of Extreme Self-Care* (Hay House, £8.99), Richardson lists her rules – we ask the experts to weigh in.

RULE 1 Get others to support you

Make a list of the tasks that can be delegated. This means your partner, kids or colleagues can make all your lives easier by giving you support. **VERDICT:** 'This is a really good idea,' agrees psychotherapist Juliet Grayson (www.therapyandcounselling.co.uk). 'Sometimes we don't let those close to us know what they can do to help – we expect them to just know. But remember, for one person doing the washing up means just that. Mum might think it includes wiping the surfaces and putting the dishes away.'

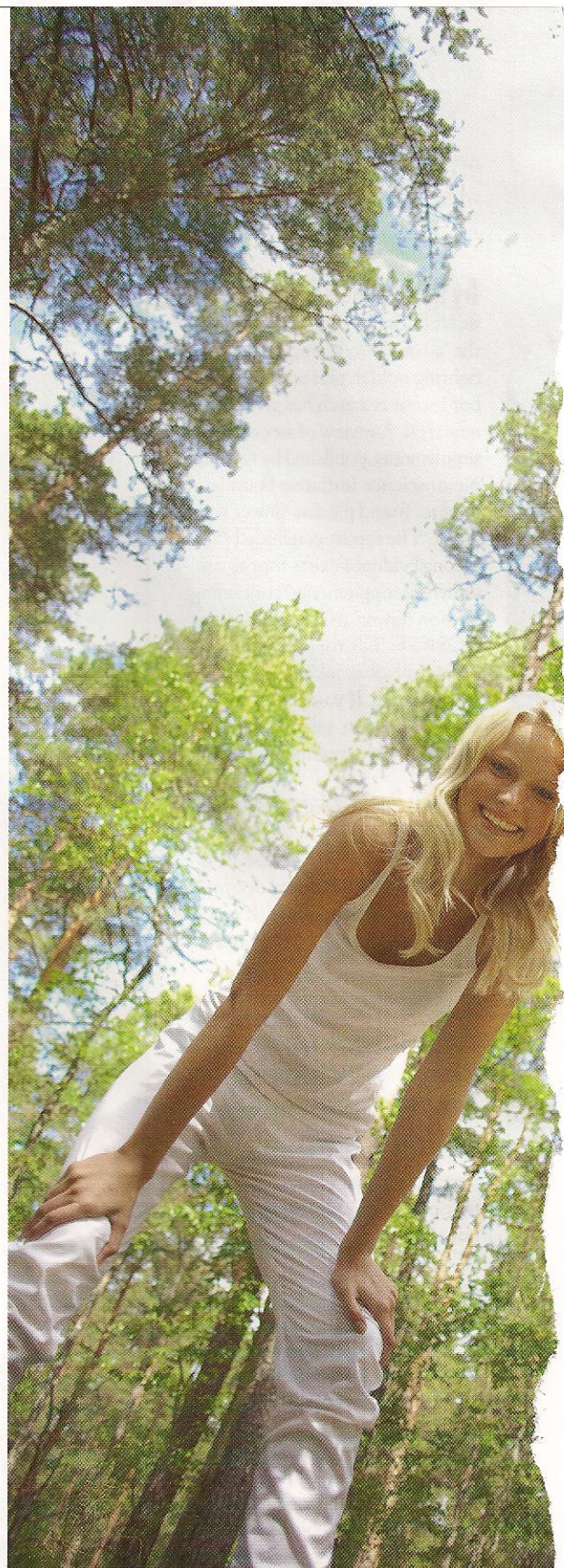
Not being clear will lead to irritation and disappointment. Clarity is crucial.'

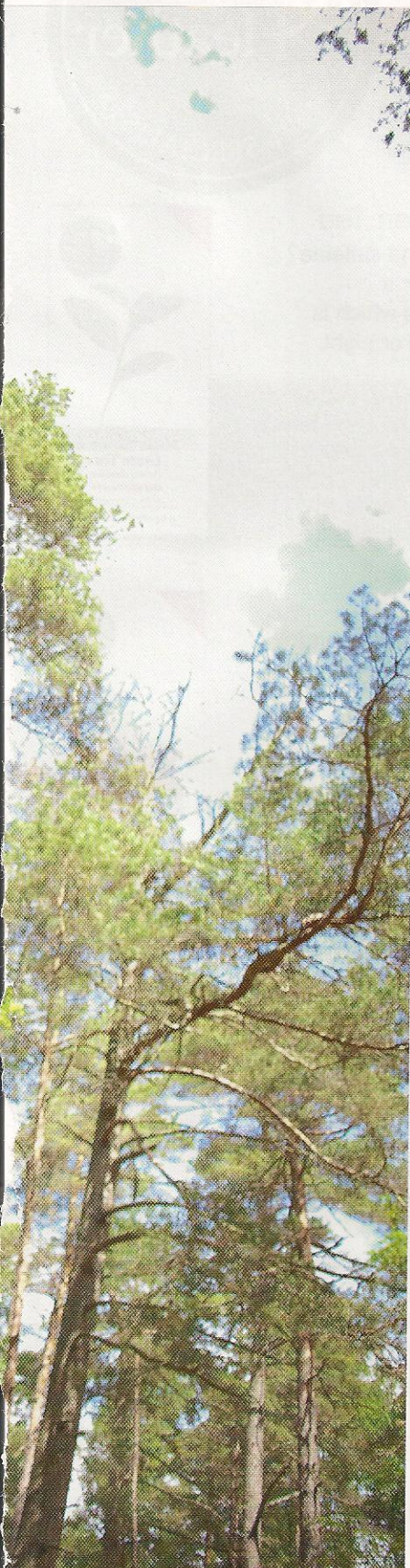
RULE 2 Give your inner control

freak a break So when your partner, kids or colleagues do get involved with chores, let them help you out in *their* way. Think how much easier it is for them to learn now rather than if something were to happen to you. **VERDICT:** 'Be clear about what you want,' says Grayson. 'But let them find their own route there. I used to find it hard to relax while my husband took twice as long as me to cook. But by letting him practice he learnt how to do it as quickly as I could.'

RULE 3 Take time before agreeing

to things Check in with your gut. On a scale of one to 10, how much do you want to join that committee? How do you feel as you imagine fitting in all the meetings and prep?





VERDICT: 'This is a good tactic as it combines the head and heart,' says psychotherapist Dr Aaron Balick (www.mindwork.co.uk). 'Being able to accept what is lost and what is gained in your choice is crucial, whatever you choose in the end.'

RULE 4 Be a responder, not reactor

Between mobile phones and email, most of us are available 24/7. But remember who's in charge – the trick is to manage technology in such a way that we become responders, not reactors.

VERDICT: 'I agree,' says Dr Balick. 'Be proactive in your relationship with the technical world. Learn to turn off when you are with friends and family – literally put your phone on "airplane mode" so it is not transmitting. Be with people, not work, at least some of the time.'

RULE 5 Give yourself a routine

From a weekly coffee with a friend to checking emails at a time that suits you, remember it's *your* life and you can schedule things as you see fit.

VERDICT: 'Most people do need routine,' says Dr Balick. 'Remember that routines need to be flexible and responsive to variables – be prepared to alter your plans if necessary.'

RULE 6 Find your passion

It's easy to get caught up in work and family commitments, but think about when you were younger. What energised you? Investigate things you'd love to make time for now, e.g. writing or art.

VERDICT: 'Schedule time for your passion. Don't let it be swallowed up by the day-to-day,' says Dr Balick.

RULE 7 Create a nourishing space

This could be your bedroom, office, car, garden or any other area. What would help you feel more peaceful and alive when you're in that space? Figure out what you need to do, get rid of everything that doesn't fit there, then add things to make you feel even happier. Once you've done this area, you can use the technique to transform your entire home.

“SCHEDULE TIME FOR WHAT EXCITES YOU. DON'T LET PASSIONS BE SWALLOWED UP”

VERDICT: 'This can lift your energy,' says feng shui expert Priya Sher. 'To obtain maximum benefits from your space, balance the elemental energy of your environment with feng shui.'

RULE 8 Zip it Make silence part of your day. Your nervous system will shift to a balanced state that allows the fight-or-flight response to rest.

VERDICT: 'We have evolved to respond to noises as warnings about potential danger, e.g. a scream,' says Dr Layla McCay, assistant medical director at Bupa. 'You become more alert, your blood pressure and

heart rate increase, and sugars and hormones like adrenaline are released. This can be useful when responding to danger, but if you're experiencing it regularly, it can cause stress, headaches and insomnia.'

RULE 9 Ask questions If you've got to go for medical tests, find out exactly how long your results will take. There's enough to be anxious about without the added suspense.

VERDICT: 'Making sure you know what's happening can help you feel more in control in stressful situations, so don't be afraid to ask questions,' says Dr McCay.

RULE 10 Make appointments with your GP or dentist – and stick to them Get any health concerns checked out – seeing an expert will help you take whatever action you need.

VERDICT: 'If you're anxious about a health issue, get it sorted sooner rather than later,' says Dr McCay. 'Anxiety affects both your mind and body, making you feel worried and irritable, affecting your sleep and concentration, and it can even cause heart palpitations. Go to your GP or dentist – you might find there's nothing to worry about at all, or that it's easily treated. Even if it turns out to be something more complicated, the sooner the problem is detected, the better. Making simple lifestyle changes can really improve the state of our health.'

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