

Soul habits

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Use your mind and body to support your soul.

THE WORDS *mind*, *body*, and *soul* are commonly used together because they're more interrelated than independent. We usually associate the mind with our thinking or intelligence and our body with our physical vessel. But what about the soul? The soul refers to our spirit, our essence, who we are at our core, including our character. So, it's safe to say that our body is the vessel that houses our soul, and our mind deeply influences the strength of this connection. By paying attention to our body's communication, we can strengthen our soul habits. This threefold mind-body-soul relationship is the foundational source for joy when we consciously engage it.



What are (and aren't) soul habits?

Soul habits are the things we automatically do to support and enhance our joy. Sometimes, though, we sabotage ourselves. Sabotage implies *conscious* action, but in this case, our actions are *unconscious*. We've developed a negative habit, so we aren't consciously choosing. And while it may sound silly, many of us aren't even conscious about being unconscious.

Whenever we're out of alignment with who we are at our soul level, we feel stressed, anxious, or "off." We may become short-tempered, blame others, and just aren't pleasant to be around.

When we become stressed or lash out at others, it's a symptom of acting unconsciously. We try to fix the symptom, but the problem is what requires our attention. It's like breaking your arm and taking medication only for the pain, not addressing the broken arm. Medication alone provides short-term relief at the expense of greater issues down the road if the real problem isn't addressed.

Nurses at risk

Nurses are prime candidates for running on an unconscious level because of the workload and stress that come with caring for patients and their families. These populations often are needy, possibly scared, and look to you as their source for comfort, care, education, and support. But you can't be fully present to care for others when you ignore what your own body is communicating to you.

The positive side of these symptoms—*anxiety and stress*—is that they're a message warning you to pay attention; to consciously choose to support yourself. However, we often ignore the message and treat only the symptoms. We might have an extra drink at night, spend more time watching TV, or stress eat. These activities strengthen unconscious behavior and don't support us in the long run. We weaken our

connection to the joy that is our soul's desire.

How do we know whether we have supporting or sabotaging habits? More important, what can we do to create habits that nurture our soul?

How to develop soul habits

To understand whether you're supporting or sabotaging your soul, first get in touch with your essence—who you are at your core. When you're peaceful and loving and engaging in activities that enhance your essence, you're being self-supportive. When you ask for support, take a break that you're due, eat a healthy lunch, or take a personal day, you begin to honor what you need. Just as you meet the demands of your patients, you're meeting the demands of your mind, body, and soul.

The opposite is also true. If you allow negativity into your life, it affects you. It may not be possible to remove all negativity, but you can be conscious of it and minimize it as best as you can. How you talk to yourself, how you spend your time, what you listen to (radio, TV, coworkers), and how you engage with coworkers, patients, and families, all have the potential to strengthen or weaken your soul habits.

What does having soul habits look like?

Vanessa, a critical care nurse, seems to operate from a place of loving peace even in the most stressful situations. She never participates in gossiping, and her colleagues never hear her complain about a patient, family member, or coworker. This doesn't mean that she won't share concerns, but she does it in a way that's constructive and productive. Her concerns aren't complaints; they're expressed with the intention of improving the situation or solving a problem.

Vanessa is able to operate like this because she's worked on developing her soul habits.

Your thought process—your mind—is the most powerful tool you have to create, nurture, and deepen your self-support. For soul habits to be developed or strengthened, you have to be in tune with your thoughts. Creating a habit requires repetition. In the beginning, repetition is a conscious decision; in this case, a conscious decision to experience joy and peace in life. With more practice, the true blueprint of your soul starts to emerge. Strengthening your self-support and intentionally investigating what's joyful and loving, versus what's detrimental to your long-term well being, over time, creates a habit.

Slowly, you'll shift your patterns and become accustomed to feelings of peace. And then, when circumstances are upsetting or stressful, your tendency to react or overreact shifts to simple awareness that you need to tap into a greater internal strength. And if you've been practicing, you can tap into your joy reserve and not deplete your bank. (See *What does having soul habits look like?*)

Strengthening joy

When staffing is low, the workload is too much, or specific patients are draining, having strong soul habits will shift how you experience, react, and respond to the external world. In turn, this alters the way others react and respond, enriching all of our interactions.

If our thoughts, words, and actions are strengthening the joy, peace, and kindness in others and ourselves, we're solidifying our soul habits. And the opposite is also true. We can weaken or reduce the joy, peace, and kindness we experience and bring to others. It's our choice.

But remember, this shift won't happen overnight. No habit was ever created that quickly. Be kind, compassionate, and caring to yourself in the process of creating joyous soul habits. ★

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