

The pyramid below shows Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This is a 1943 theory in psychology by Abraham Maslow, which is still relevant, and often referred to today. Maslow studied those he called exemplary people such as Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt etc, and also the healthiest 1% of college students. He suggested that we would only be able to really take care of the second layer if we have the first layer covered, or mastered. The same goes for the third layer, where you first need to have taken care of the second layer, and so on.

our health is in one of the first layers that needs to be taken care of, even before friendship! When we have a health issue, this is easier to remember; we know that we first need to find the right specialist, just like at home, and we often get support from our doctor at home to do this even before we leave. When our health is OK it is more about prevention, and then we can easily forget, and even sometimes start to think that self-care is not so important, and that it is in the top layer where it says 'self-actualization'. However, the fact that if

The Pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



What does Maslow have to do with the health of expats? It is a way of looking at what happens after we move to another location. First, we need to make sure we find a place to sleep and the food we need; depending on the location this can take less or more effort.

Then the second layer of 'safety' starts to be important, and this is where health is placed. So

'True selfcare grows your soul, fake selfcare grows your butt'.

you do not take good enough care of yourself, very often your health will eventually suffer, shows that self-care is firmly in the bottom layers of the pyramid.



prescription? What do you know is important for you in self-care? This can be a tricky topic as sometimes we might have come to have the wrong idea about what we really need. Simple example: you might think 'when I am lonely I need chocolate, or perhaps a glass of wine'; in fact what you probably really need to do is go out and meet other people, only that is a much bigger and scarier step than just sitting on the sofa and eating or drinking.

To put it bluntly: True selfcare grows your soul, fake selfcare grows your butt. Now this may be a crude way of putting it, but at least the message might stick. Try having this discussion with others: what is true self-care for each of us? How can I make my individual alarm bells ring at the moment that I start to wander off into fake self-care, so that I can make a conscious decision to do true self-care? How are others doing that?

'Your body and your mind are worth it and will be thankful'.

Something important to realise here for parents or partners - taking care of yourself must come before taking care of others! Consider the metaphor of the safety instructions given on an aeroplane, where the stewardess explains to us that we have to put the mask on ourselves first and only then onto somebody else. If you don't have enough oxygen yourself, you are no use at all to the other person. And the oxygen could stand for many other things. For example, relaxing undisturbed in a hot bath could be just the right way for you to take care of yourself.

Also, even where illnesses have already been diagnosed, we can still do a lot ourselves. Here are two examples of common diseases,

You need to take good care of yourself (and your family) on a lot of different levels:

The physical

- Make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date
- Always have relevant information on your health history with you (e.g. wear an ICE - In Case of Emergency - 'dog' tag, or card, in your wallet)
- Make it a priority to have regular medical check-ups
- Keep your medication up-to-date and in stock
- Get enough exercise, do some sport

The psychological

- Know what you need to feel happy
- Be pro-active in anticipating what lies ahead
- Prevent the build-up of depressed feelings

What a list! Instead of being shocked, think about it for a moment - when you felt really well and on top of things, at that moment you were probably also taking good care of yourself, but without making a conscious effort to do so. How did you do that? What is your unique

with researched advice as to how you can help yourself in addition to any medication you may be taking:

Heart disease

- Quit smoking
- Be active
- Eat the right food, following World Health Organisation guidelines
- Keep to the healthy BMI or Quetelet-index range (weight in kilos divided by the square of your height in centimetres); if your result is above 25 the advice is to lose 10 % of your body weight
- Drink no more than two units of alcohol per day

Depression

- Put structure in your day, even if you don't feel like it
- Do some physical activity every day that you like to do
- Have social contacts and ask for support
- Be very careful with alcohol, and do not take more than two units per day
- Don't put demands on yourself that are too high
- Try to look at the now, not at the past, or the future

Often self-care is mistaken for self-indulgence. I hope I have made it clear here that good self-care is not a luxury, it is a necessity! Your body and your mind are worth it and will be thankful! And you are the one that has to take responsibility for it. Wouldn't it be great to just WANT to take good care of yourself, and not to HAVE TO? Perhaps others will be persuaded to follow your example as well.

Do ask for help; other expats are dealing with the same issues all the time. Share your experiences; you don't have to do it all by yourself. Most local Outpost offices have basic information regarding health services within their *Inside Guides*. Shell Medical Offices around the world also have the current vaccination schemes for different countries.



All these actions may look easy to some people, but for others they can be difficult. Very often we have fallen into bad habits, and nothing is harder than changing fixed patterns of behaviour. It does not feel so tempting when change is forced upon you, but perhaps it has more appeal if you look at it as true self-care. From there you can look at how to make the advice work best for you; if you don't like going to the gym, why not take a daily walk to do the food shopping instead?

Some of the information in this article comes from the 'Official Guidelines for Dutch General Practitioners on Heart Disease and Depression'. When there are illnesses involved, never hesitate to get support from a health care professional in choosing the right self-care for you.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Reading:

A.H. Maslow 'Motivation and Personality', Third edition, Harper and Row Publishers

Internet links:

- www.nlm.nih.gov - US National Library of Medicine
- www.who.org - World Health Organisation
- www.eatwell.gov.uk - Healthy Diet, Weight and BMI calculator
- www.americanheart.org Healthy Food Guidelines
- www.wikipedia.org - General online encyclopaedia
- www.icetags.co.uk - 'In Case of Emergency' information tags



Dr Angelique Van Dam

Dr. Annelique Van Dam graduated from the Vrije Universiteit (The Free University) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

She is a member of the Dutch Family Physicians Association (NHG) and has worked as a medical doctor in the Netherlands, France, Gambia, Turkey and China. She also studied psychotherapy and acupuncture and currently practices as a certified life coach and trainer.

She is also a member of the Global Outpost Advisory Council. Angelique has been a Shell spouse since 1990 and currently lives with her husband and three children in her native Netherlands.

SAUDI ARABIA - EMBRACING THE BENEFITS

MARY BROEKHUIJSEN



"This one looks great on you!" my friends say enthusiastically when I'm trying on my first abaya. I'm about to travel to Saudi Arabia and the abaya (the required black dress for women in Saudi Arabia) will be my 'business attire'. Although I've lived in Bahrain for the past three years, the abaya is not required for non-Muslims in the little kingdom.

My trip to Saudi Arabia is quite exceptional; I am the first spouse in our 'Al Jubail' Shell community since 2004 to receive permission from our Country Chair to travel to Saudi Arabia. Quite some paperwork and patience is involved to get all the official stamps in my passport. Because, as a woman, I have been invited to deliver a presentation in the Industrial City of Al Jubail I even need personal permission from the Governor of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.

I look at myself in the mirror to see how elegant the abaya looks on me. A nice thing about this outfit is that I don't have to worry about what to wear underneath. The local Arab lady in the store teaches me how to wrap the scarf around my head in case I am requested to cover my hair.

The Saudi culture is an entirely different way of life. Saudi Arabia, also known, as 'the land of the Two Holy Mosques' is culturally conservative with strict adherence to the Wahhabi interpretation of the Sharia principles set forth in the Qur'an. All Saudis are Muslim by law and Islamic religion dominates all personal, economic, political and legal aspects of life.

The country, controlling over a quarter of the world's oil reserves, advanced more rapidly than any other country in modern history. Despite the changes this wealth has brought to the desert country, once populated by Bedouins, it holds