Coach and bestselling author Cheryl Richardson explains to Angela Donaldson why we need to take our self-care one step further.

Do you ever feel resentful about how much you do? Tired and stressed from doing it all without help? Do you have trouble saying ‘no’?

Cheryl Richardson, author of The Art of Extreme Self-Care: Transform Your Life One Month at a Time (Hay House, $15.95) says such behaviours sabotage your health and happiness and can ‘rob’ you of your life. Here she shares her strategies for combating these self-defeating behaviours.

Your book is about ‘extreme’ self-care. Why does it need to be ‘extreme’?
The word ‘extreme’ is in recognition of the fact that we need to take our self-care to a whole new level. Many of us spend so much time in the noble, good girl role, taking care of everyone else and neglecting our own needs; we end up burnt out, exhausted and resentful, with our

health suffering. Extreme self-care challenges you to go to the opposite extreme so you fall somewhere in the middle. Caring for yourself extremely well will help you develop a strong relationship with yourself.

Readers are asked to change one behaviour a month for 12 months. Why is it done this way?
The book is based on my own experience of practising extreme self-care. I know making these changes isn’t easy and takes time. I wanted to give people a process where they can engage in one change at a time. It initially requires a willingness to sit with some pretty uncomfortable feelings, such as guilt for putting your needs first, fear of being criticised by others, or anxiety from challenging long-held beliefs and behaviours.

There are no quick fixes: we’re talking about challenging a way of life.

What happens if we say ‘yes’ to something but really want to say ‘no’?

When you agree to something from a place of guilt and obligation, that’s not giving from a place of love. Giving in this way is done in an effort to please, to manage people’s perceptions of you and to make sure people don’t get mad at you. By doing this, you build up a sense of resentment and take on a martyr role, feeling irritable and short-changed and with no energy.

A key concept is learning to say ‘no’ and mastering the art of disappointing and upsetting others. Why do we need to do that?

It’s about developing the courage and self-esteem to say ‘no’ in a loving and firm way when your gut is telling you ‘no’. Then you need to be willing to sit with the anxiety you feel afterwards when you’re worried that person is mad at you, that they won’t like you or will think you’re selfish. It’s about tuning into what’s important to you on the inside and taking action to support your intuitive self.
Chronic resentment builds up in the body and can wreak havoc.

A whole chapter of your book is dedicated to anger. What’s the main thing we need to know about this powerful emotion?
When you don’t take good care of yourself, anger builds up. It affects your health and relationships, putting a wedge between you and the people you love. In my mother’s generation, women couldn’t ask for what they wanted so they went through life being angry about not having a voice. We’ve carried on that tradition and there are many women and men who don’t speak up, who are treated inappropriately and turn away and swallow their anger. My book teaches how to express your anger responsibly so you protect your relationship with yourself and others.

You appeared on Oprah and were booed when you suggested mothers put their own care before that of their children or partner. What did you mean?
If a mother takes extremely good care of herself first, she becomes an even better parent and models healthy life skills for her children. She reduces her chances of feeling resentful, angry and irritable around her children. When I ask audiences, ‘How many of you know if your mother had taken better care of herself and made it a priority, your childhood would have been better?’ every hand goes up. I ask, ‘How many of you knew your mother was angry though she never said anything?’ Every hand goes up. In making your self-care your priority, you become nicer to be around. Everybody wins.

How to begin extreme self-care

1. **End the deprivation**
   Become keenly aware of how, why and where you feel deprived. Ask yourself what you need more of, less of, what you are yearning for and what is causing your resentment.

2. **Fall in love... with yourself**
   For 30 days in a row, stand in front of a mirror, look yourself in the eyes and say, ‘I love you [insert your name].’ It will feel strange at first but will eventually begin to change the way you feel about yourself.

3. **Disappoint people**
   Often we go along with things so we don’t disappoint people or make people cranky. As a result, we become cranky because we’re overloaded. Get more comfortable with disappointing people and better at honouring yourself.

4. **Find your rhythm**
   Repetition and rhythm in life create a balanced body and mind. Ask yourself, ‘What routine can I put in place daily – such as meditation or playing with a pet – that will improve my life the most?’ Then put it in place.

5. **Ask for and receive help from others**
   Doing everything yourself because you know best can damage relationships, disempower others and make you resentful. Pick an area of your life – at home or work – where you could do with help.

Choose someone you’d like to help you and ask for their assistance.

6. **Create an ‘absolute no’ list**
   Become discriminating about how you spend your time. Make a list of things you will no longer do so that you protect your quality of life. These things may include: rushing, compromising your needs to keep the peace, allowing your mind to be on work when you’re not working.

7. **Create a soul-nourishing environment**
   Living or working in a space that is cluttered or devoid of beauty can make you feel depressed, exhausted and unmotivated. Look around you and see what needs to change. Create an inspiring, soul-nourishing environment that fills you with joy and energy.

8. **Don’t swallow your anger**
   Regardless of why you keep quiet, it’s too expensive to swallow your anger. Take a stand for your soul by beginning to speak your truth. Start small and build up. ‘Please stop,
that’s not OK with me,’ or ‘It’s not OK for you to speak to me in that way,’ are helpful statements.

Good health is the foundation of a good life. Care for your body extremely well before a problem arises. Take full responsibility for your health. Become your own expert on your body. List aspects of your health or appearance that need to be addressed and take action on them.

‘Suck it up!’ is the catchcry of our generation, but being a sensitive person can be a great gift and can open you to a rich, satisfying life. Embrace your sensitivity and guard it by spending more time in silence, reducing exposure to technology and sensational and violent news, and limiting your contact with ‘toxic’ people.

Many of us lose sight of things that make us truly happy. Find an image, object or symbol that reflects an inner part of you that longs to be expressed. Ask yourself, ‘If this object could speak, what would it tell me?’ When you uncover the part of you that’s ready to be reawakened, do something to wake it up!

The ‘kit’ is a list of things you need for support when the chips are down, like: who is a good person for you to turn to when you’re upset? What does your body need to feel nurtured? What unhelpful coping strategies do you need to avoid? What’s your best healthy distraction? Keep your list in a safe place.

CHERYL RICHARDSON WILL BE SPEAKING at the I Can Do It! conference, which also features Louise L Hay, in Melbourne on August 18-19 and Sydney on August 25-26. For more information, visit www.hayhouse.com.au