

# Small Shifts, Big Impact:

## Practical Strategies for Physician Self-Care



*Joann Schaefer, MD*  
*LifeBridge Nebraska Medical Director*

As physicians, we dedicate our lives to the care of others, often at the expense of our own well-being. The demands of our profession can make self-care feel like an afterthought. Yet, small, intentional changes

can lead to significant improvements in our health, resilience, and overall job satisfaction.

At LifeBridge Nebraska, we recognize that wellness isn't about sweeping lifestyle overhauls or hours of free time we simply don't have. Rather, it's about making practical, sustainable shifts that fit into our existing routines. Here are a few simple strategies our coaches often recommend to physicians:

### The 60-Second Reset

Stress is inevitable in medicine, but it doesn't have to be all-consuming. Taking just 60 seconds between patient encounters to practice deep breathing, stretch, or step outside can help reset your nervous system. One effective technique is the 4-7-8 breathing method, which involves inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven, and exhaling for eight. Research suggests that controlled breathing exercises like this can reduce anxiety, lower blood pressure, and improve focus (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005).

### Micro-Movements

Finding time for exercise can be challenging, but movement doesn't have to be structured or time-consuming. Small shifts, such as taking the stairs, stretching between patients, or doing a few squats while waiting for a meeting to start, can add up. Studies have shown that breaking up sedentary time with short bursts of activity can improve cardiovascular health and reduce stress (Tremblay et al., 2010).



### Reclaiming Control Over Your Schedule

While we can't always dictate our hours, we can be intentional about small boundaries that protect our time. This might mean scheduling a 10-minute buffer between appointments, setting limits on after-hours emails, or blocking time for a real lunch break. Even small wins like drinking your coffee while sitting down instead of rushing can shift your sense of control and reduce burnout (Shanafelt et al., 2017).

### The One-Minute Journal for Perspective

Journaling doesn't require a fancy notebook or 30 minutes of deep reflection. Take one minute at the end of your shift to jot down:

- One thing that went well today
- One challenge you faced
- One thing you're looking forward to

This simple habit can help reframe your mindset, build resilience, and serve as a reminder that even in the most challenging days, there are moments of success and meaning.

### Small Moments of Connection

Isolation is a significant contributor to physician burnout. Whether it's a quick check-in with a colleague, a text to a friend, or a few minutes of conversation with a loved one, prioritizing connection can provide a much-needed emotional lift. Research from the Harvard Study of Adult Development highlights that strong social relationships are one of the biggest predictors of long-term well-being (Waldinger & Schulz, 2010).

### Fueling Your Body

We often advise our patients on healthy eating habits, yet we struggle to follow them ourselves. Instead of focusing on overhauling your entire diet, make one small, intentional change: drink more water, keep a protein-rich snack on hand, or swap out one processed food for something nutrient-dense. Progress, not perfection, is the goal.

## Leveraging Support When You Need It

One of the most powerful wellness strategies is knowing when to ask for help. Whether it's talking with a colleague or loved one, or utilizing confidential resources like LifeBridge Nebraska, support is available. You don't have to navigate the challenges of medicine alone.

Wellness isn't about adding more to your already full plate. It's about making small shifts that fit within your daily life. These strategies don't require extra hours in your day, but they do require intentionality. Start with one change this week and notice its impact.

At LifeBridge Nebraska, we're here to support you every step of the way. If you're looking for additional resources, education, or coaching, reach out. Small changes can lead to big transformations, and you deserve to prioritize your well-being—just as much as you prioritize your patients. □

## Resources

- Brown, R. P., & Gerbarg, P. L. (2005). Sudarshan Kriya yogic breathing in the treatment of stress, anxiety, and depression: Part I—Neurophysiologic model. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 11(1), 189-201.
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