



Notes to Self:
New Year,
Same Me.
Still Learning.

*Notes to Self:
New Year, Same Me. Still Learning.*

by Tatyana Dimitrova



Cover Art

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Hello Friend!

Let us introduce you to the first release of *Notes to Self*: a safe space where you can hopefully find the support and understanding you need. For the couple of minutes that it takes you to read this booklet, I hope you find something you have been looking for, even if you didn't know you were looking for it. Life can be overwhelming, right? You may be struggling right now and you have every right to feel the way you do. It's okay to feel scared, helpless and worried for the future. We are here to show you that you are not alone in that. How you're feeling is valid.

It's frustrating not to be understood in the world, don't you think? For that, we need very very very specific words. Knowing that a word exists is knowing that someone, somewhere has felt this way before. Words allow us to connect and find solace in those that came before us and nonetheless felt the same way. Imagine if we were able to talk about everything! Because not everything feels like something else. Somewhere in the world there should be a place for everyone. We hope that between the pages of *Notes to Self*, you will find somewhat a place to feel safe and understood. We hope you find those words which make you feel like *you have felt that before*, that you exist! Because language is real. The power of it is that it gets deeper than any human touch. If someone were to touch you right now, they would only get to your skin. But when they speak to you, they are all the way through. We cannot cover all that we want in one tiny booklet, though. So if you want us to include something, whether it is advice or to inform others, in the following releases, our e-mail is notes-to-self@ru.nl. We would love to hear from you!

Actually, life *is* beautiful and you have time. Don't you know? It is your light that lights the worlds, as the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi said. So, here are some things that you might like to hear on this blue Monday: It is *okay* to feel blue this Monday and every other Monday after that. The world is a better place with you in it. You have so many good days to look forward to. You are doing your best and your best *is* enough. If you need a sign to keep going, let *this* be it. To the person who feels like they don't have it all together - *news flash: nobody does!* The one not on top of everything and feeling in limbo, the one feeling chaos whilst staring out of the window: learn that some days are grey... and *that's absolutely okay*. Give yourself time and space to breathe.



You woke up this morning. You're still here. *You have a purpose*. Don't allow the week ahead to overwhelm you. Focus on taking the next step. *You've got this*. If you are worth something later, *you are worth something now*, for wheat is wheat, even if people think it is grass at first. *Will I be something? Am I something?* And the answer is: *You always were. And you still have time to be*. Go easy on yourself. You are doing great. This is just really hard. It is okay not to have a dream. Take each day as it comes. You'll get more chances. At friendships. At relationships. At job- or school-related progress. At following your dreams. At chasing your passions. It's not now or never. *There will always be other chances and other opportunities*.

**You are not
“behind”
in life.
Your journey
is just different.**

Things that don't define your worth:

- ✿ your productivity
- ✿ your weight
- ✿ your grades
- ✿ your past experiences
- ✿ your relationship status
- ✿ your income

It's Okay.

This is what we want you to know today: *it's okay*.

- It's okay to not feel okay sometimes.
- Or even often.
- It's okay to ask for help.
- It's okay to be tired.
- It's okay to rest.
- It's okay to take a break.
- It's okay to lose control once in a while.
- It's okay even if you lose control more than once.
- It's okay to not read that text.
- It's okay to prioritise yourself and your health .
- It's okay to realise that you've done too much or not enough.
- It's okay to take a step back.
- It's okay to rant.
- It's okay to call a friend.
- It's okay to be angry.
- It's okay to be sad.
- It's okay to be confused.
- It's okay to go back to bed.
- It's okay to look up at the sky, not knowing what to do.
- It's okay to scream.
- It's okay to cry.
- It's okay to stop for a moment.
- It's okay because *you're still learning*.

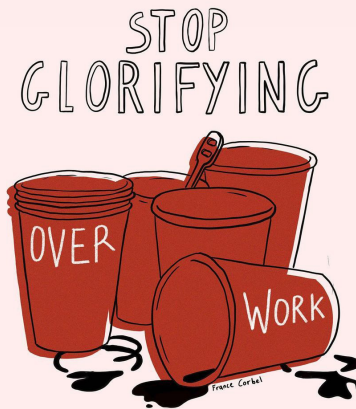
There is nothing
cool, strong or
hero-worthy
about not sleeping
or eating.

During the exam period, and, frankly, as a student, I would say the rest of the time as well, among students is encouraged a disturbing culture of not sleeping, eating, taking care of oneself and pushing one's body and mind to total burnout or point of breakdown.

**THIS IS NOT HEALTHY
OR OKAY.**

Encourage yourself and people around you to:

- Check in with each other on a genuine level.
- Hold space for conversations outside of academics.
- Bring each other snacks, drinks and meals.
- Not compare or discuss grades.
- Take breaks! Do fun and relaxing things!
- Be honest about schedules: are you overcommitted? Are you taking too many classes? Can you handle all of it?
- Not glamourise unhealthy behaviours, such as not sleeping or eating. *Don't be afraid to check in with friends privately & directly to let them know you are concerned.*

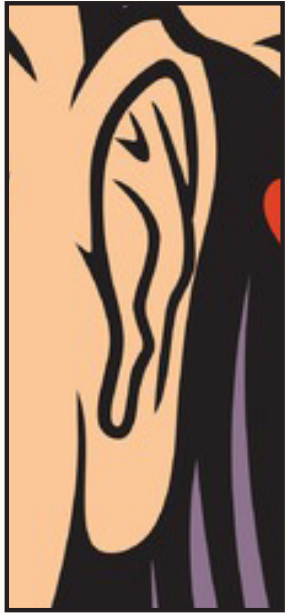


**Self-care
isn't selfish.**

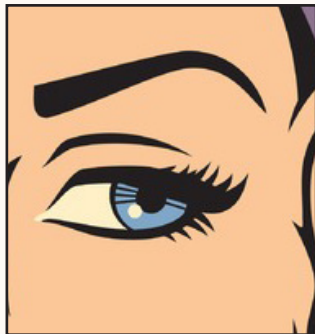
**Work on
being kinder
to yourself when
you mess up.**

“

**Don't focus
on success**



or failure.



**Focus on
effort.
Focus on
trying.**

”

What is mental fatigue?

Mental fatigue is the feeling that you cannot concentrate to do work, even the easiest task overall. Your brain gets very tired, almost like a burnout.

Dealing with Mental Fatigue

How to deal with it?

Eat a nutritious snack and meal to fuel your brain: Eat whenever you are hungry instead of saying you don't have time. "I want to eat but I won't because it's just a craving. I am not really hungry." Wrong! Mental hunger is just as important as physical hunger. Cravings are normal and you should honour them. If you are thinking about food, that means your body is giving you cues that it's hungry. *Eat breakfast.* If you don't eat breakfast, you might break down quickly. Eating breakfast will sustain your energy levels.

What causes mental fatigue?

There are many reasons that cause this, such as taking no breaks, not eating enough food to get energy, sitting at an uncomfortable study environment and focusing too much on negativity (that you never get things right). Lack of sleep may be the biggest reason, causing brain strain and fuzzy vision.



Do a bit of exercise: Go for a 10 minute walk to clear your head and get some fresh air. It doesn't need to be anything big, it can be as simple as that. Do a small stretching routine to move around your muscles and joints.

But remember: exercise is a celebration of what your body can do. *Not* a punishment for what you ate.

Sleep well: Try keeping a consistent sleeping pattern. Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day.

Take breaks: divide your schedule and take break frequently.

Stress is something most students deal with - whether it stems from school, personal life, or both. While small levels of stress may be motivational to finish an assignments sooner and more efficiently, oftentimes stress can overwhelm us. Here are some tips that can partially help you to prevent that from happening.

Let Go of Stress

Tips for Handling Stress

Take a deep breath. Set a timer and give yourself five minutes to feel sad and complain about how much school sucks. When your time is finished, you have to move on.

Make a list (in your head or on paper) of all the things that are stressing you out. Then go through each one and either decide how you're going to fix it or come up with a statement that explains why you shouldn't be stressed about it.

Take a walk outside. Listen to music with headphones while you're doing it. Try not to think about school or anything else that may be stressing you out. If you're having trouble clearing your mind enough to do homework, listen to music while you're studying. Having some background noise can help you destress, distract your brain from what you are stressed about and help you concentrate on your work. Do something relaxing to take your mind off of school for a little bit. A lot of us get overwhelmed with study work, and then feel as if they have to spend every waking minute studying. This is not healthy, and if you're super stressed, take the time to breathe and do something not study-related that makes you feel good. Make yourself tea or hot chocolate, do a face mask, read a chapter of your favourite book, etc. Even if it's only a short break, when you return to your studies, you will be in a much better state of mind to focus.

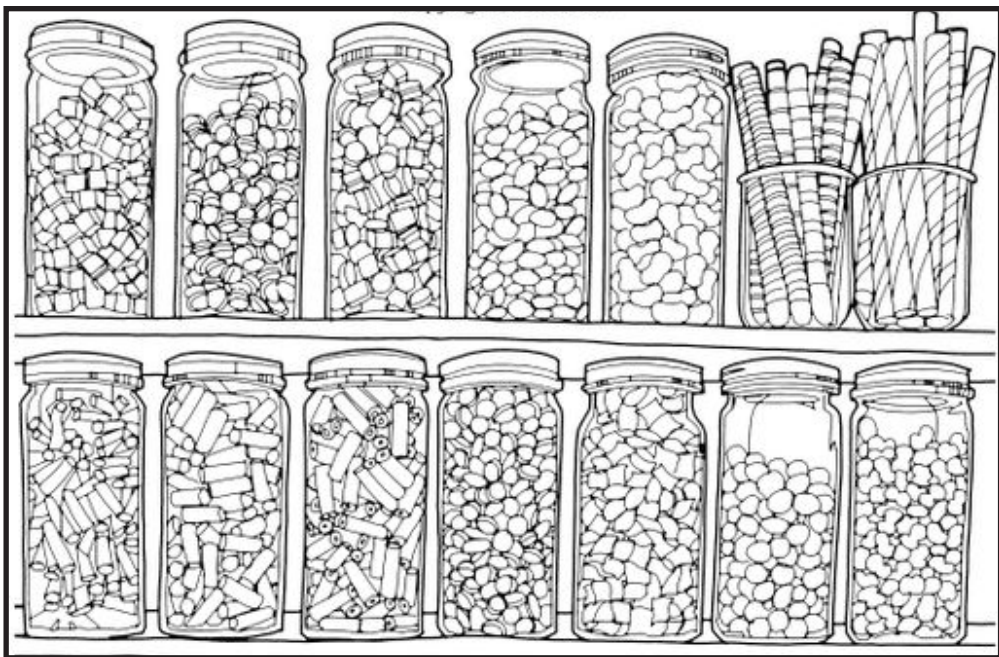
Talk to someone close to you about what's stressing you out. Even if they can't necessarily do anything to help, voicing the frustration out loud can make you feel better. At the very least, this person can offer you encouragement.

Practice positive self-talk. Remind yourself that you are capable of dealing with the things that are stressing you out. Tell yourself that you are a great person. Remind yourself of everything you have already accomplished. Affirming yourself, and your abilities, even if you don't believe it at the moment, can help you feel better about yourself over time.



Give it a Try: Make a List!

(or doodle,
it's your choice)



STAYING FOCUSED ON STUDYING (WITH ADHD)

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health disorder that can cause above-normal levels of hyperactive and impulsive behaviours. People with ADHD may also have trouble focusing their attention on a single task or sitting still for long periods of time. The important thing is that both adults and children can have ADHD. However, ADHD symptoms and experiences can differ in individuals. And the sad part is that most people with ADHD don't even get diagnosed

until later in life or at all (in particular, girls). They go about their daily activities struggling thinking that this is a normal thing which everyone experiences. With that said, this part of the booklet is not meant to diagnose anyone, but simply help you understand yourself better. Even if you don't (think you) have ADHD, the following tips can still be of help, or they can give you a tiny insight into what ADHD individuals may be going through.

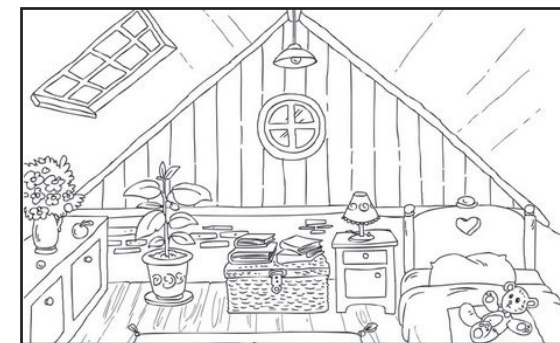
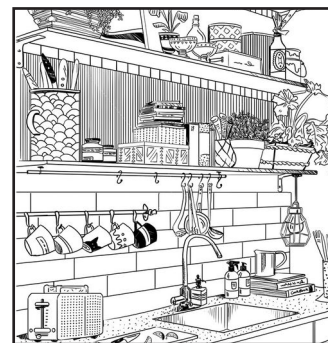
Reduce brain fog by staying hydrated & make sure you eat! Try to keep an at least somewhat healthy lifestyle.

Reduce impulsive phone use by setting your phone to grayscale.

Listen to relaxing music as a background. If you can afford, get noise cancelling headphones. Use scent (e.g. scented candles) to create an atmosphere that encourages focusing. Alternatively, if you are not into scents, simply establish a comfortable place that you only study at. It is easier to study at a place that you only associate with studying.

Colouring or doodling as you focus on audio: it can help restlessness and you can start with the illustrations provided on this page!

Realistic to-do lists: break down tasks and don't add too many tasks! Create a structures schedule: plan ahead by making a daily/weekly schedule or to-do list. It doesn't have to be specific, but let it be a reference tool so that you know what you should be doing and not forget. You can even set your phone to send you notifications, for example, 30 minutes before each event or task. However, don't forget to schedule some free time for yourself as well!



Write everything down: and I mean *EVERYTHING*. Having a daily to-do list or a schedule at a place where you can always see it really helps with being reminded what you have to get done and reduces the chance that you'll forget about it.

Surround yourself with people who support you. Whether classmates or friends, make sure you have a good support network. Mental health can be daunting but you shouldn't be alone and, most importantly, you are not the only one struggling with it.

Take your medications: if you are fortunate enough to be diagnosed and prescribed medications, then please take your medications as directed! Again, to not forget about it, you can set alarms or reminders on your phone. It can also help to set more than one. Sometimes, the first one doesn't do the job since people with ADHD tend to get easily distracted. With the second, third or even fourth reminder/ alarm, there's a very small chance that you will forget about the medications. You can also put the medication at a visible place where you can see it every day: the visual reminder solidifies it.

Food Struggle and Body Image

Studies have shown that disordered eating behaviours among university students seem to be a significant issue. Contrary to what many may think, “disordered eating” is not less serious than an eating disorder. The only difference between the two is that disordered eating does not clearly fit into an yet outlined diagnosis by the Diagnostic Statistical Manual. Both are equally unhealthy and harmful. In addition, the misconception created around the two terms may often make it harder to detect disordered eating, because we live in a world which not just normalises but celebrated disordered eating behaviours. Body obsession and dieting should not be seen as a part of normal life. If you are someone struggling with food and body image, here are some things to help you go through the day.

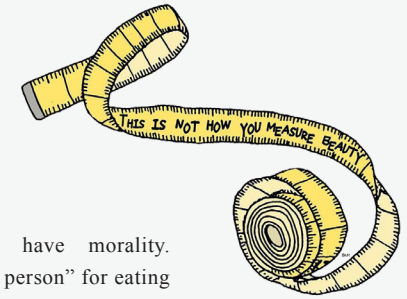


illustration: [@keivi.jp](#)

Slowly but
steadily
unlearn
all the ways
you've been
socialised
to hate
your body.

Malnutrition comes in all shapes and sizes. It's a psychological state with physical and psychological consequences. It's not a size, shape or weight. One does not have to be in a conventionally deemed “underweight” body to be malnourished. The definition of being “underweight” is relevant to individual context (being predominantly biologically determined). “Underweight” for our bodies is determined by our genetics, not our “look” or society's misunderstanding of how illness can occur. Malnutrition is not an issue only thin people are at risk of suffering from. What all of this means is: *if we all ate the same meals and had the same workouts, we would still all have different bodies.*

Commenting
on someone's
health, body
or food choice
can easily do
more harm
than good, no
matter how you
intended it to
be. Think before
you speak.



Food does not have morality. You're not a “bad person” for eating something with less nutritional value. We're quick to blame food but food isn't always what's causing an issue or what needs to be “fixed.” It's not “wasted” calories. There is no such thing. It's flavour. It's delicious. Yumminess. It won't hurt you as much as disordered eating will. It's memories with friends and family. It's good for you. Your body deserves to be nourished and loved; every other thought or message is a lie.

Give more compliments that have **nothing to do with physical appearance**. Let's start here:

“I am glad to have you as my friend.”

“You always make me laugh.”

“I appreciate you.”

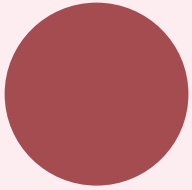
“Thin” is not
a compliment.
“Fat” is not
an insult.
Diet culture
has brainwashed
you.



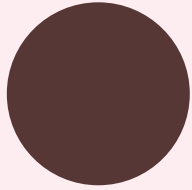
illustration: [@keivi.jp](#)

Check Point: Mental Health Break

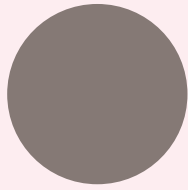
Stop. Take a breath and check in with yourself.



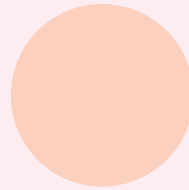
Breathe.



Notice any discomfort.



Identify any needs.



Thank yourself for this moment.

Repeat as often as necessary.

It is normal to be stressed during times of great uncertainty.

Mental health struggles are nothing to be ashamed of.

“It’s far better to show up and put your artwork out there imperfectly, rather than never show it at all.”

- Florence Given



BE CREATIVE

illustration: [@disadoodles](#)

Be creative. Even if you never really “make” anything. Write out plot synopses of stories and then move on. Design OCs you’ll never use. Make mood boards and concept art and don’t do anything with them. Life is too short to forget everything that inspired you and creation doesn’t have to be “complete” to be worth the time you put into it. Sucking at something is the first step at being sort of good at something.

Take away with yourself:

Just because others may have it worse than you, doesn't mean your situation doesn't matter. Because it does. There's so much competition with struggles, but we all really need to focus on helping each other in whatever ways we can to collectively make our lives less hard.



We are all born so beautiful.

The greatest tragedy is
being convinced we are not.



It's brave that you get up in the morning.
It's brave that you keep going, that you keep believing in something more, something bigger, even when you may not know what you are hoping for. It is brave that you fight, that you choose, every single day, to move forward - because that is what makes you strong.



It's okay and important to
take time for yourself

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