

You

TEND TO
YOURSELF, BODY
AND SOUL

.....LOW-LIFT MANICURES
SPLIT THE LABOR AT HOME.....
WHEN KIDS PLAY FAVES



Relax, It's "Me Time"

Self-care has become not just a catchphrase but a cultural cure-all. And yet finding time to unwind can feel like one more task on an absurd to-do list. One mom test-drove spalike products to find out: Can a sheet mask change your state of mind? →

ANNA WOLF

by **LESLIE GOLDMAN**

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I KNEW I'D HIT my parenting rock bottom when I threatened to hurl our 8-year-old daughter's beloved bear, Teddy, into the path of our neighbor's active lawn mower (he was mowing at night) after she got out of bed for the fifth time in as many minutes.¹ Clearly, my pandemic stress was catching up with me. The truth is, I was spending more time doing dishes than I was practicing any semblance of self-care. Since the country started its lockdown, the closest I'd gotten to achieving any quarantine zen involved one of those foot peels where you soak your feet in fruit acids for an hour and then watch them molt like snakes over the next two weeks.² The luxurious brand of "me time" splashed all over social media (rose-petal-strewn bubble baths, a steaming latte paired with a good book, dancing like no one is watching) was absurdly out of reach.

In a stroke of luck, my *Parents* editor sent over some beauty goodies and a self-care subscription box that promised to help harried people like me "enjoy this brutiful (brutal yet beautiful) journey called life without having to wait for the next promotion/relationship/accomplishment or even the next week/month/year,"³ according to the packaging. My mission: Discover whether any of them could help me reclaim a slice of my sanity.

1. In my defense (if such a thing exists), this happened after yet another *Groundhog-esque Day* for me as I fire juggled homeschooling, career, and emotional stability.
2. The fact that picking layer upon layer of dead skin from my heels—and texting blow-by-blow pics to my friends—felt like self-care should give you adequate insight into my frazzled state.
3. Good news for me, considering that the Teddy incident took me out of the running for Mom of the Year.



AMNH Birthday Cake Lip Scrub, \$15; aminnah.com

Patchology Poshpeel PEDI CURE, \$20; ulta.com

First up in my self-care experiment: birthday-cake lip scrub. Massaging in lip scrub is the sort of purely self-indulgent ritual I used to partake in before having kids, like sleeping past 7:30 A.M. or having sex without barricading the door with the laundry hamper, because our kids taught themselves how to pick locks while sheltering in place.⁴ This one smelled delish and was fun to rub in, thanks to the chunky sugar, essential oils, and pink and yellow sprinkles. I also appreciated that it took very little time—I could sneak it in between rounds of reading *Curious George* and still feel I'd done something that checked off a box on my self-care bingo card.

The next night I tried a vitamin-infused sheet mask that made me look just enough like Lord Voldemort that our 6-year-old nearly burst into tears, prompting me to peel it off and stuff it back in its packaging until after bedtime. After I'd reapplied it, I attempted to relax on the couch and watch *Dead to Me*, but my husband refused to even look my way,⁵ let alone fetch me the straw I now realized I needed for my wine. Verdict: Self not cared for.

A cream chamomile face mask was better received by all. I mixed a little of the powdered kaolin clay with water, applied it to my T-zone, and lay down in bed, announcing I needed ten minutes of “alone time.” I felt a pleasant tightening and tingling as it dried and an even more pleasant sense of nobody bothering me.

The box also included a lemon-scented moisturizing body butter with five types of oil. I immediately started working it into what I affectionately refer to as my Dirty Mom Knees,⁶ which have been Sahara dry since our tummy-time days and have lingered thanks to countless hours of shoelace tying, under-the-bed toy searching, and spill cleaning. No product has worked on these knees. This balm was no exception.

I attempted to lay the groundwork for the most decadent self-care act, a bath, by reminding every member of my family about it every day leading up to it. Our younger daughter was eager to play the role of bath sommelier, creating just the right temp and pouring in the salts.

“Okay, lovey,” I said as I lowered myself into the warm tub full of self-



The Honest Company Me Moment Soaking Salts, \$15; target.com

The mask below and the lip scrub on the opposite page came in a TheraBox Self Care Subscription Box. \$35/month; mytherabox.com (not shown)

Flower Mill Calming Chamomile Mask, \$24; flowermillbeauty.com

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care. “Time for me to take my bath.”

She didn't move. “Honey, I need to be alone for this,” I reiterated, as soothing water washed over me for the first time in a decade. “Can you go play?” She dipped her feet in and moaned, “Oooh, it feels so goood.”

I stared longingly at the book I'd optimistically brought with me, realizing that “me time” was swiftly turning into “we time.” But honestly, I could be soaking in mop water, and as long as nobody is asking me for a snack, I'm ecstatic. The Bath Squatter and I chatted and took some deep breaths together, and I felt pleasantly loosey-goosey afterward.

Did my stress soon bubble back up as I began prepping dinner in a kitchen that's been appropriately cleaned just once in the past half year? It did.

Sheet masks aren't going to fix the general hellscape that has been 2020. But perhaps by carving out tiny pockets of time to treat ourselves in any way, shape, or form, we can help release a bit of steam from our emotional pressure cookers so when that steam inevitably starts to build again, we don't immediately explode. The hot bath was lovely, but a meditation or workout would have left me feeling equally restored. The lip scrub took only two minutes, but it was two minutes of me doing me. It wasn't so much about the products as it was the mini escape they offered. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to try to sneak in a pedicure before Teddy and I start our Zoom family-therapy session. ✖

4. Yes, this actually happened.
5. This was the first time I'd ever used a sheet mask, and my family was clearly ill prepared.
6. Never google “dirty + mom + knees.”



Leslie Goldman is a Parents contributor and mom of two in Chicago.