



Interview

SOUL SISTERS

Their self-care books have become global bestsellers with an A-list following. Here, yoga teacher **Nadia Narain** and her chef sister **Katia Narain Philips** share how we can all be a little kinder to ourselves

Words **TABITHA LASLEY**

“**P**eople think it is about buying the right yoga leggings, or getting manicures. But

we need to be careful we're not just concentrating on the outside. The main thing is to be kinder to yourself,” explains Nadia Narain, when asked about the basics of self-care. She's an expert in the field and she and sister Katia have been teaching people to look after themselves for more than 20 years – Nadia is a yoga instructor at London's Triyoga centre, while Katia is a masseuse and health-food chef who founded the capital's first raw-food café – and have gained a celebrity following in the process. Reese Witherspoon, Rachel Weisz and Sienna Miller are all fans, and Kate Moss bought 22 copies of their first book, *Self-Care For The Real World*, as Christmas presents for friends. The sisters have since published a second tome, *Rituals for Every Day*, with easy-to-follow advice on how to press the pause button on modern life.

Heir apparent to the clean-eating movement, the concept of self-care has gained traction over the past year – enter #selfcare in Instagram and you'll bring up 16 million posts. But as Nadia points out, this surge of interest can be something of a mixed blessing: “It's become a buzzword, but I sometimes think we do self-care wrong,” she says. “People spend so much time hashtagging self-care that they're not actually in the moment.”

At its most basic, self-care is about being kind to yourself. It sounds simple, but it takes practice. Here, the sisters show us how...

WATCH YOUR TONE

Nadia: I always check my internal dialogue. I've noticed that I'll be so much more generous to other people than I am to myself. English women are very prone to this. There's a great quote by the Dalai Lama where he says: 'You're not qualified to look after other anyone unless you look after yourself first.' It's like when you're on an aeroplane, and they instruct you to put the oxygen mask on yourself before you put it on your child. Because if you lose oxygen, you can't help anybody else.

Katia: You should speak to yourself like you would a good friend. And do small things daily rather than big things that don't last long.

SCHEDULE YOUR SELF-CARE

N: How you start your morning sets the tone for the day. I get up early and meditate. I also practise gratitude. It takes two minutes in the morning, and two minutes at night. In the morning, I write out my intentions for the day, and at night, I write three great things that happened that day. I'm much happier when I have an early dinner. I live by a park, so if it's still light outside, it's nice to eat, then go for a little walk. And I always have a bath in the evening, because I teach so many people and I have lots of energy around me. I add salts and aromatherapy oils, and that's my grounding, relaxing time. Then I try to get to bed pretty early, by around 10 or 10.30pm.

K: In the morning, I like to have some time on my own before I go into work, so I can gather myself and check in. In the evening, I make sure that upstairs is calm and the lights are dimmed, so when we go up we can transition into bedtime mode.

RATION YOUR SCREEN TIME

N: At night, I make sure my phone isn't in my bedroom. The first hour of the morning is your most creative time, so if you reach for your phone, and start checking texts, emails and social media before you're even out of bed, it's a real waste of energy. If something comes in from work, that can put you in stress mode before you've even started your day. There's nothing that can't wait an hour. I try to turn my phone off by 9pm, and never look at social media before bed. I sometimes feel like social media is a download of other people's lives on my existence. It might be fine for others, but I'm quite sensitive, so I have to be a bit more disciplined. Everyone is different. You have to pay attention to what you need.

FORGET ABOUT FAD DIETS

N: We've done every fad diet in the book: juices, fasts, all that stuff. But extremes aren't sustainable. You need to find balance and figure out what works for you. I've drunk spirulina for years. It's

got high levels of protein in it, and B vitamins, so it's good for stress. If I'm on the go I'll add it to some coconut water, or make a smoothie with chia seeds and tropical fruit.

K: We were born and brought up in Hong Kong, where we ate a lot of Asian food: bone-broth soups, fish, vegetables and rice. Most nights we had steamed fish with ginger, watercress soup and rice. Mum was really strict. We weren't allowed white bread or sweets in the house. What I choose to put in my body really affects my mood. I feel better when I'm eating fresh ingredients. If you sit quietly without distraction from TV or phones, and spend time chewing your food, and notice how your body feels after eating certain things, you'll know what to avoid and what to add. My favourite superfoods are spirulina to get that green kick, chia seeds for extra protein, and oils and cacao nibs for magnesium and iron.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE

N: I've been teaching yoga for 24 years. You get so many benefits from it: physical, mental, emotional. I come back to myself when I do it. Yoga creates a calmness in my mind and in my body, but I've never put it in the same category as exercise. I train once a week, outside in the park. I'm quite proud of myself that I've been able to do it through a whole winter, with snow on the ground. I also swim in the Ladies Pond in Hampstead. I went until about November and I picked it up again in spring. I like that feeling of being outside.

MAKE TIME FOR TREATMENTS

N: I go for massages regularly. And I have more facials now, because I'm older, and don't get any injections. Abigail James (abigailjames.com) is great. She does a lot of facial massage. I also see an osteopath and a homeopath/energy worker, who lies you on a massage table and does healing work.

K: In Asia, we were brought up around acupuncture and massages. In the east it's not so much a luxury as a way of life. People have reflexology on their lunch breaks. You'd go to these little places with 20 chairs and sit down for an hour while they pounded your feet. Being a massage therapist myself, I know

how important bodywork is. I go to a guy called Pawel Wiacek at Triyoga (triyoga.co.uk). I just had a great facial from The Organic Pharmacy in Hampstead (theorganicpharmacy.com), the Diamond Treatment. I see a specialist in craniosacral therapy and trauma release called Steve Haines (stevehaines.net). I also have a life coach, Kate Crow (katecrow.com). If it wasn't for her, I don't know how I'd have got through the whole process with the books. I'm an introvert and really shy, and I suddenly had to go on radio and do interviews. I thought I was going to die. Kate helped me to come out of my shell, and really shift old habits and old beliefs about myself.

Nadia and Katia's book: Rituals for Every Day is out now (Hutchinson, £14.99).

OUR LONDON GLOSSARY

NADIA AND KATIA

HEALTH FOOD HAVEN

K: I love that Earth Natural Foods in Kentish Town has loads of bulk options; it's organic and has plenty of great natural cleaning products. It's reasonably priced, too. 200-202 Kentish Town Road, Camden, NW5; earthnaturalfoods.co.uk

BEST BITES

N: The Palomar's delicious Israeli food. I really like the beetroot and goat's cheese salad. **K:** Morito in Exmouth Market does small tapas using fresh ingredients; it's a mix of Moroccan, Spanish and Turkish. 34 Rupert Street, Soho, W1; thepalomar.co.uk 32 Exmouth Market, Clerkenwell, EC1; morito.co.uk

FAVOURITE SPA

We both like the Russian bathhouse Banya No.1, and we try to visit every few months. You go into the sauna, they massage you with twigs and then throw cold water over you. 17 Micawber Street, Hoxton, N1; gobanya.co.uk

RETAIL THERAPY

N: Aimé London on Ledbury Road is great for clothes. And I love old-fashioned book shops like Daunt Books and Primrose Hill Books. **K:** My favourite London market is Queen's Park Farmers Market; it sells a huge range of seasonal produce from all over the UK. 32 Ledbury Road, Notting Hill, W1; aimelondon.com 83 Marylebone High Street, Marylebone, W1; dauntbooks.co.uk 134 Regent's Park Rd, Primrose Hill, NW1; primrosehillbooks.com

HIDDEN GEM

K: There are so many, but there's a stunning plant shop in Dulwich called Forest. It's so beautiful, I could spend hours and a lot of money there. I have an urban jungle at home. 43 Lordship Lane, Dulwich, SE22; forest.london