Using Automatic Rules in Self Care

Automatic rules are so simple, yet can be particularly effective in helping to make better self care choices. So what are they and how can they be used?

An Automatic rule has the format 'when...then'. **When** I do, think, or feel something, or when something happens around me, ***then*** I respond in a certain way. For example, when I notice I haven't slept well for 3 nights in a row then I get strict on my sleep hygiene. When I notice my mind is racing, then I pause and take 3 even breaths.

The value of automatic rules is that they take the decision making and thinking out of the equation. This can be particularly useful when there are emotional blocks or you tend to overthink. The focus is on your what you are going to do, your behaviour. I like using the word 'automatic' as it emphasises that you just do it. For someone like me who can tend to drift into my own world of thoughts and feelings it helps to clear this and get on with things.

To make them most useful here's some quick tips.

* Identify specific 'whens' and 'thens'
* Keep it simple and immediate.
* Smaller things usually work best, especially to begin with and you're building up your skill at them.
* You can use them on the run. Here's my situation e.g. I notice I'm avoiding something I should do, what are the 'whens' I'm seeing, and what can I have as my 'then'. This helps me become conscious of what is happening and switch into just doing the action I choose.
* It's a choice to have an automatic rule about something. They can be used as sparingly or as often as is helpful.

So this week try experimenting with automatic rules and see if they are useful for you.