

Comprehensive self-care plan

Why self-care counts

Self-care is an important part of daily life, but it's often the first thing that gets sacrificed when life is busy and stressful. People often think that taking time for themselves seems indulgent but looking after your own well-being will help you care for others.

When confronted with distressing experiences, a self-care plan can help you focus, make decisions, and stay healthy. "Please put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others". Many of us have heard this important rule on flight safety recordings and it's a useful phrase to remember the importance of self-care – if you don't look after yourself first, you won't be able to help yourself or others.

What is self-care?

Self-care refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and well-being.

Self-care helps to prevent stress and anxiety:

- By incorporating self-care activities into your regular routine, like going for a walk or socialising with friends, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate, so you can avoid or reduce the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Self-care makes you more effective:

- When you take time for yourself and give your body the food, rest, and activity it needs, you will actually have more energy to meet the demands of daily life – however unusual they might be. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you be more productive and more resilient to stressors.

How to create a self-care plan

1

Step 1 – Evaluate your coping skills

Examining your own habits is an important first step in developing a self-care plan. How do you typically deal with life's demands? Can you identify when you need to take a break? When faced with challenges, we can use either positive coping strategies or negative coping strategies. Below are a few examples of each. Which strategies do you use?

Positive	Negative
Deep breathing	Yelling
Listening to music	Smoking
Exercising	Pacing
Reading	Skipping meals
Connecting with others	Drinking alcohol excessively
Engaging in a hobby	Withdrawal from friends/Family
Meditating	Biting fingernails

2

Step 2 – Identify your daily self-care needs

Take a moment to consider what you value and need in your everyday life AND what you value and need during challenging times. It may not seem like the right time to be planning, but time spent now will reap benefits later if you can get a plan in place. Remember that self-care extends far beyond your basic physical needs: consider your psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and workplace well-being.

Our template for Identifying needs is included at the end of this fact sheet.



3

Step 3 – Reflect, Examine, Replace

Reflect.

Reflect on the existing coping strategies you have identified have outlined in the previous activities. What’s working? What isn’t working? Keep the helpful tools and remove anything that is unhelpful.

Examine.

Are there barriers to maintaining your self-care? Examine how you can address these barriers. Start taking steps toward incorporating new strategies that will benefit your health and well-being.

Replace.

Work on reducing, and then eliminating, negative coping strategies. If you find yourself using negative strategies, then begin by choosing one action you feel is most harmful and identify a positive strategy to replace it. Positive coping skills are an important part of your self-care toolkit.

4

Step 4 – Create your self-care plan

Once you’ve determined your personal needs and strategies, write them down. Your self-care plan can be as simple or as detailed as you need it to be. You may choose to keep a detailed plan on your desk and carry a simplified version in your wallet, in your handbag, or on your phone. Look at it regularly, keep going back to it and refining it as needed.

Our useful template to create your Personal Self Care Plan is included at the end of this fact sheet.

Template 1: Identifying needs

Daily self-care

What are you doing to support your overall well-being on a day-to-day basis? Do you engage in self-care practices now? Are you more active in some areas of self-care than others? Use the table below to help you determine which areas may need more support.

Area of Self Care	Current Practices	Practices to try
Physical – (e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups, etc.)		
Emotional – (e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge my own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way, etc.)		
Spiritual – (e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections, etc.)		
Professional – (e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills, etc.)		
Social – (e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends, etc.)		
Financial – (e.g. understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, pay off debt, etc.)		
Psychological – (e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, journal, pursue new interests, learn new skills, access psychotherapy, life coaching, or counselling support through your EFAP if needed, etc.)		



Daily self-care

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Emergency Self Care Strategies	Helpful	Harmful
Relaxation/Staying Calm – Which activities help you to relax (e.g. deep breathing, taking a walk)? Which activities make you more agitated or frustrated (e.g. yelling, swearing, or drinking)?		
Self-Talk – Helpful self-talk may include, "I am safe/ I can do this." Harmful self-talk may include, "I can't handle this/I knew this would happen/I deserve this."		
Social Support – Which family members and friends can you reach out to for help or support? Which people should you avoid during times of stress? Be honest about who helps and who zaps your energy.		
Mood – Which activities support a positive mood (e.g. listening to uplifting music, enjoying the sunshine)? What should you avoid when times get tough (e.g. staying in bed all day, avoiding social activities)?		

Template 2: Your self-care plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategy, write it down. Your self-care plan can be as simple or complex as you need it to be. You don't need to use this template you may just prefer a list or diagram. Here is an example of how your self-care plan might look:

MY DAILY SELF-CARE PLAN List your favourite practices for each category					
Body	Mind	Spirit	Emotions	Relationships	Work
MY TOP THREE POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES Record three strategies you want to get in the habit of using					
MY EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN					
Helpful (to do) • List your top five emergency practices			Harmful (to avoid) <i>This will serve as a helpful reminder to keep you on track.</i> • List five practices, people, places, or things to avoid during crisis or stress.		