

Self-care

Self-care refers to a set of activities in which individuals engage with the intention to prevent disease, promote optimal health, and manage chronic illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider. Self-care involves using self-awareness to determine your health needs and taking the initiative to meet those needs.

Types of **self-care**



Self-care includes a variety of practices, such as:



Mental health

- Managing stress with relaxing activities (e.g., hobbies, listening to music, meditation, breathing exercises)
- Participating in social activities and building supportive relationships
- Getting adequate sleep and rest



Physical health

- Eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity
- Maintaining good personal hygiene
- Seeking medical assistance when ill



Environmental health

- Maintaining a healthy and safe environment (e.g., a clean home)
- Spending time in nature (e.g., gardening, walking outdoors)
- Taking time away from screens (e.g., computer, smartphone, television)



Aspirational health

- Carving out time for a hobby or self-improvement
- Seeking out professional development and/or mentorship
- Working on a budget or financial plan

Health benefits of self-care

- [Burnout](#) prevention (e.g., prevention of feelings of emotional exhaustion, loss of self-identity)
- Delayed onset/severity of disease
- Disease prevention and/or management
- Enhanced life satisfaction
- Improved disease recovery/rehabilitation
- Improved quality of life and overall well-being through healthy lifestyle habits (i.e., physical and psychological health)
- [Stress management](#) and reduced stress (i.e., self-reported stress levels)

How to practice self-care

The steps below can empower you to engage in regular self-care practices that suit your individual needs and health goals.

1 Assess your self-care needs

Use [mindfulness](#) to check in on how you're feeling and determine what you need right now. Mindfulness is the act of paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgemental way.

You can practice mindfulness by taking a moment, as little as a minute, to close your eyes and bring your attention internally. Take some slow, deep breaths, and ask yourself "How am I feeling?" and "What do I need at this moment?"

Get involved

Learning about your health and treatment plan can help you feel more involved in your own care. When working with your practitioner, ask questions to clarify your treatment plan and request educational materials and tools that can help you follow recommendations.

There are many educational resources available to you, such as:

- Your integrative healthcare provider, who can provide personalized support and guidance
- Fullscript's [Knowledge Center](#), which provides articles and other resources on a variety of integrative health topics
- Government health resources (e.g., CDC's [Healthy Living](#), NIH's [Medline Plus](#), NIH's [Your Healthiest Self: Wellness Toolkits](#))

2 Plan and prepare

To develop a regular self-care habit, you can schedule self-care activities in your calendar, similar to your other commitments. This allocates time in your day or week dedicated to self-care.

Self-care calendar



An example of a weekly calendar with self-care activities is provided below.

| Time | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 8 a.m. | | Group fitness class | | | Therapy appointment | Group fitness class | |
| 9 a.m. | | Work | Work | Work | Work | Work | |
| 8 a.m. | Grocery shopping | | | | | | Family hike |
| 11 a.m. | Prepare weekly meals | | | | | | |
| 12 p.m. | | | | Lunchtime yoga | | | |
| 1 p.m. | | | | Work | | | |
| 2 p.m. | | | | | | | Clean home |
| 3 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 4 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 5 p.m. | | | Mentorship meeting | | | | |
| 6 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 7 p.m. | | Language class | Walk in the park | | | | |
| 8 p.m. | Meditation video | | | | | Dinner with friends | Read a book (screen-free time) |



Mental health



Physical health



Environmental health



Aspirational health

Research suggests that your self-care plan should be dynamic rather than static in order to account for changes such as your health status and personal responsibilities. You can regularly check in on your needs, such as on a weekly basis, by reflecting and self-assessing how you feel.

Set a reminder

Similar to using your calendar, you can also set up notifications as a reminder to keep up with smaller self-care behaviors, such as drinking a glass of water, getting up from your desk to stretch, and doing a minute of [deep breathing](#). You can set reminders on your mobile phone, use notifications on your wearable device, or any other method that is accessible to you.

3 Stay accountable

Research suggests that support from others, including healthcare practitioners, family, and significant others, can improve self-care behavior. For example, working out with an exercise partner is associated with more time spent exercising, particularly when your partner provides emotional support such as encouragement. Similarly, individuals may abandon self-care practices when they feel they are not supported.

Get an accountability partner

Find an accountability partner, such as a significant other, friend, family member, or coworker, to participate in self-care activities with you. A partner can also provide support in other ways, such as regularly checking in with you to see how your self-care routine is going, offer emotional support, and help keep you accountable.

Use an app

Mobile wellness apps can help you to stay on track with your self-care routine and even help you find new ways to engage in self-care. View the list of [top wellness apps](#) recommended by Fullscript practitioners.

Try a group program

Group-based programs may provide social support and help keep you engaged and motivated. Examples include support groups for health conditions and group wellness or fitness classes that can help keep you accountable.



4 Maintain your boundaries

Setting and maintaining your personal boundaries between work and home is an important self-care strategy.

Boundaries can look different for everyone and may include:

- Asking for help with or delegating tasks (e.g., housework, errands)
- Communicating to others about work and home responsibilities
- Physically separating yourself from your workplace (e.g., commuting to/from work, having a dedicated office or workspace at home)
- Saying "no" to additional commitments to avoid overextending yourself
- Setting a start and end time to your workday to avoid overworking
- Silencing work notifications outside of working hours
- Stopping work during lunch breaks
- Using vacation and personal days

5 Talk about it

Having conversations about self-care can help normalize self-care in your network and community, supporting a culture that prioritizes self-care and wellness. You can ask your loved ones or coworkers how they took care of themselves today, invite others to take part in your activities, and inspire others by sharing what you are doing to care for yourself.



References

1. Alexander, G. K., Rollins, K., Walker, D., Wong, L., & Pennings, J. (2015). Yoga for self-care and burnout prevention among nurses. *Workplace Health & Safety*, 63(10), 462–470.
2. Ayala, E. E., Winseman, J. S., Johnsen, R. D., & Mason, H. (2018). U.S. medical students who engage in self-care report less stress and higher quality of life. *BMC Medical Education*, 18(1), 189.
3. Godfrey, C. M., Harrison, M. B., Lysaght, R., Lamb, M., Graham, I. D., & Oakley, P. (2010). The experience of self-care: A systematic review. *JBI Library of Systematic Reviews*, 8(34), 1351–1460.
4. Greaves, C. J., & Campbell, J. L. (2007). Supporting self-care in general practice. *The British Journal of General Practice*, 57(543), 814–821.
5. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
6. Mills, J., Wand, T., & Fraser, J. A. (2018). Exploring the meaning and practice of self-care among palliative care nurses and doctors: A qualitative study. *BMC Palliative Care*, 17(1), 63.
7. Narasimhan, M., Allotey P., & Hardon, A. (2019). Self care interventions to advance health and wellbeing: A conceptual framework to inform normative guidance. *BMJ* 365, l688.
8. Rackow, P., Scholz, U., & Hornung, R. (2015). Received social support and exercising: An intervention study to test the enabling hypothesis. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 20(4), 763–776.
9. Rees, S., & Williams, A. (2009). Promoting and supporting self-management for adults living in the community with physical chronic illness: A systematic review of the effectiveness and meaningfulness of the patient-practitioner encounter. *JBI Library of Systematic Reviews*, 7(13), 492–582.
10. Riegel, B., Dunbar, S. B., Fitzsimons, D., Freedland, K. E., Lee, C. S., Middleton, S., Stromberg, A., Vellone, E., Webber, D. E., & Jaarsma, T. (2021). Self-care research: Where are we now? Where are we going? *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 116, 103402.
11. Rupert, P. A., & Dorociak, K. E. (2019). Self-care, stress, and well-being among practicing psychologists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 50(5), 343–350.
12. World Health Organization. (2014). Self care for health. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/205887>.



For more educational content and resources: www.fullscript.com/learn



This handout was developed and medically reviewed by Fullscript's Integrative Medical Advisory team.
*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This information is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

Updated: August 2021