



Self-Care Starter Kit

Looking after yourself is an important part of living a happy and healthy life. 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.

In this Self-Care Starter Kit, we describe why self-care matters, why it's important to take time to look after yourself, and how you can build a self-care plan to improve your quality of life.



The Case for Self-Care

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Life is busy. There are always tasks to do at home, work is busy and can be stressful, your children need your time and energy, and your calendar is jammed. In an effort to keep your schedule under control, sometimes you skip meals, miss your class at the gym, or cancel plans with friends.

When life gets busy, self-care is the first thing we sacrifice. People often think that taking time for themselves in the middle of busy times seems indulgent, but looking after your well-being will help you be productive and care for others.

Self-care is not selfish.

Self-care helps to prevent burnout. Excessive or prolonged stress can lead to a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, often referred to as burnout. Burnout reduces productivity, zaps your energy, and can lead to physical or mental concerns. By incorporating self-care activities into your regular routine, like going for a walk or socializing with friends, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate, so you can avoid or reduce the symptoms of burnout.

Self-care helps relationships. Self-care helps you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself and others. Doing things that make you feel physically and mentally good boosts your confidence and self-esteem. When you feel good, you are happier and better able to maintain positive relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. By practicing self-care, you also demonstrate to the people around you that you know how to set healthy, functional boundaries, which sets a great example and also helps to align their expectations of you.

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. Much like refueling the engine of your car, self-care activities refuel your body and mind. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you be more productive and more resilient to stressors.



Building a Self-Care Plan

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When it comes to self-care plans, there is no one-size-fits-all option. We all have different needs, strengths, and limitations. The following four-step process will help you to build a plan that's just right for you.



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

- Deep breathing
- Stretching
- Meditation
- Listening to music
- Exercising
- Reading
- Going for a walk
- Taking a bath
- Socializing with friends
- Sitting outside and relaxing
- Engaging in a hobby

Negative

- Yelling
- Acting aggressively
- Overeating
- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- Smoking
- Pacing
- Biting your fingernails
- Taking drugs
- Skipping meals
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Dangerous driving

Be honest when evaluating your current behaviours. If you find yourself lashing out or reaching for a cigarette instead of taking a deep breath and refocusing during periods of frustration, it may be time to re-evaluate your go-to coping skills.

Step 2: Identify Your Self-Care Needs

We are all faced with unique challenges and no two people have the same self-care needs.

Take a moment to consider what you value and need in your everyday life (daily self-care needs) versus what you value and need in the event of a crisis (emergency self-care needs). Remember that self-care extends far beyond your basic physical needs: consider your psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and workplace well-being.

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? You can 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.)		

Step 2: Identify Your Self-Care Needs (continued)

Emergency Self-Care

When you are faced with a crisis, you likely won't have time to create a coping strategy. Take time to develop a plan in advance so it's there when you need it.

Try completing the following table to help identify your unique self-care needs during times of distress.



Emergency Self-Care Tools	Helpful (What To Do)	Harmful (What To Avoid)
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)?		
Resilience What, or who, helps you to get through difficult times? What helps you bounce back? Conversely, what or who feeds negativity for you?		

Step 3: Barriers and Areas for Improvement



Reflect

Reflect on the existing coping strategies and self-care tools you have outlined in the previous activities. What's working? What isn't working? Keep the helpful tools, and ditch the stuff that doesn't help you.

Examine

Are there barriers to maintaining your self-care? Examine how you can address these barriers. Start taking steps toward incorporating new strategies and tools 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.

Step 4: Create 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 may choose to keep a detailed plan at home and carry a simplified version in your wallet, in your purse, or on your phone. Here is an example of how your simplified self-care plan might look:

MY DAILY SELF-CARE PLAN					
Body	Mind	Spirit	Emotions	Relationships	Work
List your favourite practices for each category.					

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)	Harmful (To Avoid)
List your top five emergency self-care practices.	List five practices, people, places, or things to avoid during times of crisis or stress. This will serve as a helpful reminder to keep you on-track.

Now that you've created your self-care plan, look at it regularly. It takes time to form good habits. Make a commitment to yourself and practice your self-care routine as often as possible – you're worth it.



Brainstorm: Self-Care Activities

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Need help identifying self-care activities to incorporate into your practice? Consider these ideas:

- Write in a journal
- Volunteer for a cause meaningful to you
- Make a gratitude list
- Take a fresh air break
- Meditate or listen to guided visualization
- Cuddle with pets
- Treat yourself to a nice meal
- Take a nap
- Listen to music
- Practice yoga
- Lay in the grass
- Go for a nature walk
- Photography
- Read a good book
- Write a blog
- Try a new hobby
- Have an adventure day
- Get a massage
- Buy yourself flowers
- Turn off electronic devices
- Have a movie marathon
- Play a game
- Dance
- Wear something that makes you feel confident
- Browse your local music store or bookstore
- Join a support group
- Have a game night with friends
- Work in the garden
- Get creative: draw, paint, write a song, or cook a new meal

“Self-care is not selfish. You cannot
serve from an empty vessel.”

- Eleanor Brownn

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