









Self-Care Self-Check

You know the value of self-care, but it’s still easy to let it fall through the cracks when life gets busy. Review the “tune up” questions below and mark each wellness area that could benefit from self-care. Then consider and add changes or goals that could make a difference.

Dimensions of wellness	
	Emotional balance <input type="checkbox"/>
	Social connections <input type="checkbox"/>
	Physical wellness <input type="checkbox"/>
	Mental pursuits <input type="checkbox"/>
	Spiritual life <input type="checkbox"/>
	Job and career <input type="checkbox"/>
	Financial responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/>
	Environment/surroundings <input type="checkbox"/>

Where could you use a self-care “tune up”?

- Where do you feel discomfort, strain, or overload?
- Where would you like to be stronger?
- Where does pressure get the best of you?
- What gets neglected or feels incomplete?

TIP: Think about an average day or week. Where do you see “pain points”? Are there areas that never make it onto your to-do list? Do you find excuses to avoid even dealing with some areas or feel stuck with “it is what it is”?

How could self-care make a difference?

- What would dial down the stress?
- What would lift you up and bring more joy?
- What would recharge and re-energize you?
- What would help you feel stronger or more balanced?
- What would make you feel like you’re growing?
- What would help you feel good about yourself?

Self-Care Toolkit

Managing day-to-day life, and the many stressors it brings, can be a challenge. It makes sense that we need to take care of our own well-being to be effective and at our best. Yet, it's often the case that the more stressed we are, the less able we are to prioritize our own needs. Understanding the wide-ranging value of self-care may help you approach it differently.

What is self-care?

You can think of it being good to yourself in ways that help you feel stronger, healthier, more grounded, balanced, and productive.

What does it look like?

Self-care can focus on basic functions, such as eating, sleeping, and being active, to feel more energized and well. But self-care is more than that. It's also about supporting our emotional well-being, being compassionate with ourselves, managing our stress, and being engaged in life – growing, learning, and connected in meaningful relationships. It can involve managing our financial well-being, investing in career development, or pursuing a sense of purpose and spiritual connection.

How does it work?

All aspects of our being – mind, body, spirit – are connected and influence one another. Stress and unhealthy ways of coping, such as drinking or overeating, strain this system.

Self-care can reduce the impact of stress and prime us to be more resilient and better able to manage challenges going forward. It can:

- **Release tension:** We can be held hostage by our hard-wired, tense stress response. Physical tension can increase emotional tension and vice versa. Self-care can help release its grip to free up our resources and disrupt this pattern.
- **Renew health:** The calming actions of self-care dial down the stress response and shift us into a restful rejuvenating state. This can strengthen the immune system, reduce inflammation, and support mental health.
- **Restore calm:** Thoughts and worries can be a sneaky way for stress to grow. Self-care allows us to develop a different relationship with external and internal stressors by helping us feel more in control and able to tap thoughtful, measured responses.
- **Replenish energy:** Like the gas in our cars, our energy, focus and motivation run down. Overloaded lives can lead to exhaustion and burnout. Healthy self-care is a way to “plug in” and refuel.
- **Recharge spirit:** Life challenges can spark negativity and gradually erode our spirit. When we treat ourselves with care, it reinforces the sense that we have value and worth, boosting self-esteem. This can help us be more engaged in our world and our own potential.

Self-care ideas and resources

Though we're each unique in what will feel like self-care, the examples and resources below may be a fit or spark ideas of your own. Taking small steps to build these supportive and enriching moves into regular habits can help turn them into healthy norms for you.

Emotional stabilizers

- Keep a journal
- Explore mindfulness practices
- Start and/or end the day with a calming routine
- Experiment with asking for help if it's hard for you
- Experiment with saying "no" if it's hard for you
- Commit to making realistic to-do lists
- Create a ritual of setting worries aside before bed
- View stressors through a "can/can't control" lens
- Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend
- Put firm boundaries around a daily "me moment"
- Take 5 minutes daily to breathe deeply and daydream
- Use a positive self-talk mantra (e.g., I can do this!)
- Your ideas:

Fulfillment drivers

- Explore the idea of a mentor
- Do informational interviews for roles of interest
- Get training in a career development area
- Put boundaries around your workday
- Make sure to use all your PTO or vacation time
- Make a vision board
- Work to get better at something you love to do
- Learn about or to do something new for you
- Plan an adventure (big or small)
- Try a creative project
- Do something spontaneous
- Be part of something bigger than you
- Your ideas:

Resource: UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc/free-guided-meditations/getting-started

Resource: Psychology Today www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-fitness/201005/ten-simple-steps-happiness-fulfillment

Physical non-negotiables

- Set and stick to a regular bedtime
- Stop looking at devices 30+ minutes before bed
- Try earplugs or sound machine for quiet sleep
- Keep a water bottle at your workstation
- Stock up on healthy snacks that you really like
- Put weights next to your desk or the TV
- Set a timer to take regular movement breaks
- Experiment to find enjoyable forms of exercise
- Learn a progressive relaxation technique
- Take five slow, deep belly breaths when tense
- Your ideas:

Social energizers

- Smile at people you pass
- Try volunteering
- Call a friend and reminisce
- Start a "game night" with friends/family
- Join a club, meet-up group, or take a class
- Each month, meet a different friend you rarely see
- Ask a coworker to join you for lunch or coffee
- Tell someone what they mean to you
- Speak up if another's negativity is bothering you
- Plan a "solo" day doing things you love
- Your ideas:

Resource: Physical Self-Care Spotlight www.schoolpsychologyselfcare.com/physical-self-care

Resource: Mental Health America www.mhanational.org/connect-others

“Stealth” factors

Self-care can also be valuable in areas that we may overlook, ignore or deny when it comes to our well-being. Challenge yourself to: See the effect, start with one small self-care move, and build in structure to make it sustainable.

Finances

- Open bills right away
- Create a plan for paying down debt
- Get guidance on loan repayment options
- Create a spending/savings plan (aka budget)
- Your ideas:

Resource: American Psychological Association

www.apa.org/topics/money

Social media

- Unfollow or mute people who bring you down
- Follow accounts that enrich you or make you smile
- Avoid “doom scrolling” – view news just once
- Take regular timeouts, put phone in airplane mode
- Your ideas:

Resource: HelpGuide

www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm

Environment

- Set a 10-minute timer for a weekly home declutter
- Try a family PIWIG challenge: Put it where it goes!
- Organize your desktop (real/virtual) at day’s end
- Carve out quiet time (use headphones if needed)
- Create playlist of songs that soothe and uplift you
- Get out in natural sunlight and fresh air daily
- Bring the outdoors in – get a hardy houseplant
- Your ideas:

Resource: University of Minnesota

www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-your-personal-environment-impact-your-wellbeing

Remember

To find the self-care tools that work best for you:

Be open to trying new approaches. Give them some time and notice the impact on your wellbeing. If it ends up being more “pain than gain,” it’s okay to try something different.

Take small steps. Self-care shouldn’t be an added pressure. It should make you feel better than before you did it. Do what is doable and build up slowly.

Commit to and protect your efforts. Self-care is not selfish or a waste of time, it’s how we stay strong and resilient, and are able to be our best. This benefits us, but also everyone around us.

Use your resources. Friends, family, coworkers – all the people who want us to succeed in life – are potential partners in this effort. Other resources, such as your EAP, can also help you identify and commit to healthy moves.

Be kind to yourself. We are all a work in progress!

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Mental Health Care FAQ

If you don't have experience with mental health professionals, it can feel daunting to reach out. Where do I start? What kind of professional should I see? What happens at an appointment? What about a virtual visit? Getting answers to your questions can make it easier to take the first step.

Why make the call?

While mental health support is vital in a crisis, it's also a valuable tool that we can use when the challenges we face are not a crisis. To use an analogy, we definitely need the help of an auto specialist if our car breaks down, but we know that turning to them for regular maintenance can help us spot and work on trouble spots before they grow into larger problems. They can also help keep our vehicle running at its best.

People seek professional support for many reasons. Some want help with thoughts, emotions, or repeated behavior patterns that are reducing their quality of life. It may be a specific concern that they need help with – grief, relationship problems, disordered eating, or substance use, for example. Others may want to understand themselves better to grow. Or perhaps it's just a desire for someone who is trained in mental health to listen and help with general problem-solving.

It can help to think of mental health care in the same way you think of physical health care. If something is causing pain or irritation or slowing you down, if there is something you'd like to correct or improve or just have questions about, a professional can help.

Who's who?

A hurdle in getting started is understanding the differences between care providers. The primary differences are education/degree, focus, and ability to prescribe medication.

Mental Health Counselor or Therapist

- Master's degree
- Licensure/certification varies
- Trained to evaluate mental health and provide therapy based on specific training programs.

Clinical Social Worker

- Master's degree in social work
- Licensure varies by state
- Trained to evaluate mental health and provide therapy based on specific training programs.

Psychologist

- Doctoral degree
- State licensed
- Trained to evaluate mental health with testing and interviews. Can diagnose, provide therapy. Can't prescribe medication in most states.

Psychiatrist

- Medical doctor who specializes in mental health
- State licensed, may also be board-certified
- Trained to diagnose mental health conditions, prescribe/manage medication, provide therapy.

Certified Peer Specialist

- Specialists who have personal experience with a mental health condition or substance use
- Trained, certified, and able to help with goal setting, mentoring, support and guidance.

What do all those letters mean?

There are many acronyms in mental health. The following examples and resources may be helpful as you research your options.

Credentials

Once a professional has an advanced degree, they take tests and must complete a set number of supervised hours to qualify for a **license**.

Certification requires the same education and testing but does not require supervised hours.

Professionals are required to attend ongoing education to maintain their license or certification.

Examples:

CAC: Certified Addictions Counselor

CAP: Certified Addiction Professional

NCC: National Certified Counselor

LAC: Licensed Addiction Counselor

LPC: Licensed Professional Counselor

LMHC: Licensed Mental Health Counselor

LMFT: Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

LCSW: Licensed Clinical Social Worker

LP/Ph.D./Psy.D: Licensed Psychologist

MD/DO: Doctor of Medicine/Osteopathic Medicine

NPP-C: Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner

You'll also see many therapy acronyms: CBT, DBT, ACT, EMDR, and so on. Each type uses a different approach to support clients. Learn more at:

www.psychologytoday.com/us/types-of-therapy

Resources

[Psychology Today: Find a Therapist](#)

[APA: Psychologist Locator](#)

[SAMHSA Treatment Locator](#)

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Dial 988](#)

Factors to consider

Qualifications: Look for a professional who is trained, licensed, or certified. Review specialties if you're seeking to address specific concerns.

Personal criteria: You may prefer to work with someone of a certain age, gender, ethnicity, or who speaks a certain language.

Treatment philosophy: Explore and think about if the description of their approach resonates with you. Does it align with how you're thinking about therapy?

Insurance coverage/cost. Determining what your insurance covers and which professionals are within your network is a good first step. However, not all therapists work with insurance. You can ask about the use of sliding fee scales, which is common.

Availability. Many professionals will note whether they're accepting new patients and if they offer evening appointments. Many book far out; when you call, ask how quickly you will be able to be seen.

Accessibility. You may potentially be seeing this individual 1-2 times per week. Having a nearby office can be a valuable benefit. However, most professionals are now also offering remote visits, which may make this factor less of an issue.

Keep in mind

Most therapists offer an initial consult to answer questions and help you determine if they'll be a fit, often at no cost.

Your EAP may be a good first call. We're available 24/7 to provide immediate support, and we can help you locate a provider in your area.

The goal is to find a person who will be a good partner in helping you reach your goals. If, after several visits, you aren't connecting, it's okay to let them know that and restart your search for someone new.

More information:

[Psychology Today: Demystifying Therapy](#)

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Substance Use Treatment

If you or a loved one are struggling with an alcohol or drug problem, it's important to know that it is treatable. But it's not always easy to understand how to get help. The brief overview below gives you a snapshot of how the process works.

The place to start is with an assessment by a qualified substance abuse professional.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (available by phone 24/7) is a good first call. We can help you learn about options available in your area and help you find a qualified professional.

Trained health care professionals use a range of assessment tools to identify a substance use disorder. They can then refer the person to an appropriate treatment option.

Treatment programs

Inpatient treatment for detoxification. If there is a potential for withdrawal symptoms, it may be necessary to start with inpatient detox. Detox provides medical supervision and intervention to prevent a medical emergency during withdrawal from the substance. This is most often needed for depressants, such as alcohol and narcotics. This inpatient treatment includes daily programs to address the substance disorder.

After detox is completed safely, the person can track to either an inpatient or outpatient program.

Inpatient and residential treatment programs are often called "rehab." These highly structured environments offer safe housing, medical care, assorted therapies, and daily programs for a set period of time, often thirty days.

Intensive outpatient programs may be a good option for those with milder or less long-term issues. These group programs meet several times a week, or daily, for several hours. They provide the level of intensity that many people need.

Treatment may involve...

Behavioral evaluation and counseling, which address mental health issues and help a person build skills for sober living. These may be individual sessions, as well as family sessions.

Medications may also be used to help restore brain balance. In addition, they may reduce risk of relapse once a person has stopped using. They may be most effective when combined with behavioral counseling.

Peer support, such as sponsors and groups (e.g. AA, NA), play a role in treatment and in ongoing recovery. They're free and available in most communities.

Be aware

Dual diagnosis is common. Very often, someone with a substance use disorder will also be dealing with a mental health concern. This may be a factor in determining the appropriate care setting.

Relapse is also common and doesn't mean failure. Recovery is a process that can last a lifetime. It may take many attempts to find the right mix of strategies that will allow a person to successfully maintain sobriety.