

Care for Your Mental Health – The Importance of Self-Care

by Harbor Mental Health | Jan 6, 2022



According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), mental health includes emotional, [psychological](#), and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others. Mental health is more than the absence of a mental illness—it's essential to your overall health and quality of life. The Importance of Self-care can play a role in maintaining your mental health and help support your treatment and recovery if you have a mental illness. Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact. Ideally, we all engage in regular self-care in which we do the

things that make us feel taken care of mentally, physically, and emotionally. But this doesn't always happen, and we may need to stop and take the time to remind ourselves we are important, too. Sometimes our feelings become too much and we need to distract ourselves until we are better able to cope. We can also strategically change how we are feeling when things become too overwhelming.

What is Self-Care?

Self-care has been defined as “a multidimensional, multifaceted process of purposeful engagement in strategies that promote healthy functioning and enhance well-being.” Essentially, the term describes a conscious act a person takes in order to promote her/his own physical, mental, and emotional health. There are many forms self-care can take. It could be ensuring you get enough sleep every night or stepping outside for a few minutes for some fresh air. The Importance of Self-care is vital for building resilience toward those [stressors](#) in life that you can't eliminate. When you've taken steps to care for your mind and body, you'll be better equipped to live your best life. Unfortunately, however, many people view self-care as a luxury, rather than a priority. Consequently, they're left feeling overwhelmed, tired, and ill-equipped to handle life's inevitable challenges. It's important to assess how you're caring for yourself in several different domains so you can ensure you're caring for your mind, body, and spirit.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important to find what you need and enjoy. It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you. In addition, although self-care is not a cure for mental illnesses, understanding what causes or triggers your mild symptoms and what coping techniques work for you can help manage your mental health.

The Importance of Self-care | Different Types

The Importance of Self-care isn't just about finding ways to relax. It's about taking care of yourself mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. In order to care for your health and well-being, it is important to find a balance that allows you to address each of these areas. Sometimes you might need more self-care in one specific area in order to restore balance or find relief from a stressor in your life.

Physical

You need to take care of your body if you want it to run efficiently. Keep in mind that there's a strong connection between your body and your mind. When you're caring for your body, you'll think and feel better too. Physical self-care includes how you're fueling your body, how much sleep you're getting, how much physical activity you are doing, and how well you're caring for your physical needs. Attending healthcare appointments, taking medication as prescribed, and managing your health are all part of good physical self-care.

Social Self-Care

Socialization is key to self-care. But, often, it's hard to make time for friends and it's easy to neglect your relationships when life gets busy. Close connections are important to your well-being. The best way to cultivate and maintain close relationships is to put time and energy into [building your relationships](#) with others. There isn't a certain number of hours you should devote to your friends or work on your relationships. Everyone has slightly different social needs. The key is to figure out what your social needs are and to build enough time in your schedule to create an optimal social life.

Mental Self-Care

The way you think and the things that you're filling your mind with greatly influence your [psychological](#) well-being. Mental self-care includes doing things that keep your mind sharp, like puzzles, or learning about a subject that fascinates you. You might find reading books or watching movies that inspire you fuels your mind. Mental self-care also involves doing things that help you stay mentally healthy. Practicing [self-compassion](#) and acceptance, for example, helps you maintain a healthier inner dialogue.

Spiritual Self-Care

Research shows that a lifestyle including [religion or spirituality](#) is generally a healthier lifestyle. Nurturing your spirit, however, doesn't have to involve religion. It can involve anything that helps you develop a deeper sense of meaning, understanding, or connection with the universe. Whether you enjoy meditation, attending a religious service, or praying, spiritual self-care is important.

The Importance of Self-care | Emotional

It's important to have healthy coping skills to deal with [uncomfortable emotions](#), like anger, anxiety, and sadness. Emotional self-care may include activities that help you acknowledge and express your feelings regularly and safely. Whether you talk to a partner or close friend about how you feel, or you set aside time for leisure activities that help you process your emotions, it's important to incorporate emotional self-care into your life.

Why is Self-Care Important?

Having an effective self-care routine has been shown to have a number of important health benefits. Some of these include:

- ***Reducing anxiety and depression***
- ***Reducing stress and improving resilience***

- **Improving *happiness***
- **Increasing *energy***
- **Reducing *burnout***
- **Stronger *interpersonal relationships***

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), self-care is important because it can help promote health, prevent disease, and help people better cope with illness. Specific forms of self-care have also been linked to different health and wellness benefits, including a longer life. Exercise, [finding a sense of purpose in life](#), and sleep have all been connected to an increased lifespan.

The Importance of Self-Care and When to Seek Professional Help

Seek professional help if you are experiencing severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted two weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty [sleeping](#)
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things you usually find enjoyable
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities

Don't wait until your symptoms are overwhelming. Talk about your concerns with your primary care provider, who can refer you to a [mental health specialist](#) if needed.

This article is provided by Dr. Ralph Kueche (Child Psychologist). Dr. Kuechle is a **Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychologist** who specializes in treating children and their families who may be struggling with mood and behavioral issues. Learn more about **Dr. Kuechle**.

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