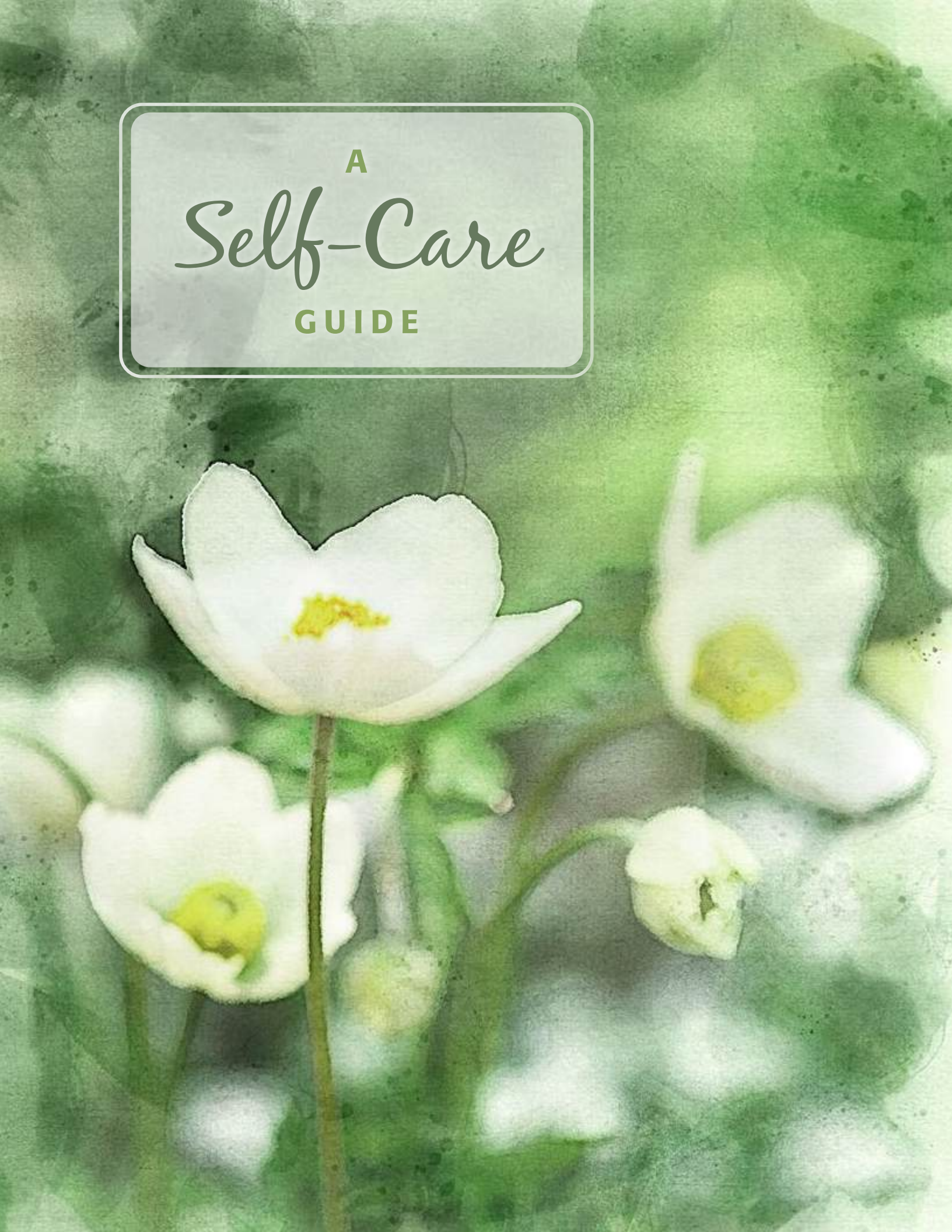


A
Self-Care
GUIDE





This resource is based on an earlier program on Self-Care.

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to people as they age, and their caregivers, since its inception in 1975. At the Memory Disorders Clinic, a person can see a team of specialists to help manage issues related to aging.

Training is available for professionals and community members. Funding for this project and the COPSA Institute for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders is provided by The State of New Jersey Department of Human Services. COPSA offers telephone support to caregivers through the Care2Caregivers helpline at 800-424-2494.

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Self-Care

You are important!

Self-care is what you do every day, or every week, to help you get well, feel well, and stay well.

Well-being includes having a positive sense of self, and being healthy physically, emotionally, and socially.

In this Guide, you will find activities to add to your day. These activities will strengthen your self-care skills to create habits and routines that will improve your well-being.

Many things help you feel well:

- Getting enough sleep and rest
- Doing things that feel productive
- Eating foods that are good for you
- Thinking positive thoughts
- Moving more
- Spending time with people you care about

You may be able to do some of these things on your own. For others, you may need some help.

It's never too early and never too late to pay attention to your wellness.

You can start anytime, wherever you are, with whatever you can do.



What helps you feel well?

I feel happy when I see ...

I love to hear ...

I have happy memories when I smell ...

One of my favorite things to do is ...

smile

"Smile, breathe, and go slowly."

— Thich Nhat Hanh

breathe

go slowly

Pause

The first step in self-care is taking breaks during the day (even a few seconds at a time). We call this **Pause**.

Pausing means being in the present moment. Don't judge yourself or others. Don't worry about what should or should not be happening.

Even when you feel sad or angry or confused, you can choose to pause and pay attention. What's going on around you? What's happening in you?

A brief pause helps you accept where you are in your life journey.

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."

—Anne Lamott



Stop and smell the roses.

Use all your senses to connect to the beauty of the world.

Self-Care Activity: *Pause & Breathe*

This activity takes 1 to 3 minutes. There are three steps to the activity:

1 *Check in*

Sit quietly. Stay upright and awake throughout the practice. Relax. If you'd like, you can try closing your eyes.

Become aware of the feelings in your body.

- What do you hear around you?
- What do you feel? Notice what it's like to sit. Pay attention to how your clothes sit on your skin. Feel what it is like to be in your body.
- You don't need to change anything, just become aware.

2 *Focus on the Breath*

Now, become aware of your breathing.

- Notice the sensation of your breath coming in and going out. You don't need to change your breath at all. Just be aware of breathing.
- Make your breath the focus of your attention.
- Your mind will wander. That's fine. When you notice you are thinking or worrying, just shift your focus back to your breathing.
- Some people like to say something to themselves as they breathe in or breathe out such as "calm" or "peace."

3 *Proceed (with awareness)*

Before you end your short pause, refocus on how your body feels.

- Notice your whole body.
- Have any sensations changed?
- Don't worry about what you're thinking or if you're doing this correctly.
- Thank yourself for making time to pause.

As you move back into your daily activities, take some of your fresh awareness and your appreciation with you.

Self-Care Tips: **Pause**

Many people find that early morning and right before going to bed are good times for a pause practice.

Try to build a Pause into your daily routines, habits, and activities. You can take a moment to focus on what you feel.

- Notice how your body feels.
- Notice the feeling of your clothes.
- Listen to your breath.
- Take a moment to really see the raindrops on the windowpane, the sunlight coming through the window, or the bright moonlight in the middle of the night.
- Feel what it's like to sit, walk, eat, or do other everyday activities.

With practice, you will find this easier.

A moment's pause can give you a whole new outlook on life.

Remember: *It's all about returning your attention again and again to the present. Be aware of the present moment. Focus on your breathing.*

Breathe

When you pause, you focus on your breath, but you don't change it. For the next practice, you will add a different kind of attention to your breath. This will help you relax, so you can feel calm.

When you are nervous or afraid, your body wants to escape or attack the problem. This can be good in an emergency. But if this happens all day, every day, your body can wear down.

When you are relaxed, your body and mind are calm. The world feels safe. You feel content.

When you control your breath, you can change how you feel. Breathing exercises can help you feel calm. This is important in difficult situations or when you feel anxious or overwhelmed.

"Breathing is your seatbelt in everyday life. It keeps you safe here in the present moment. If you know how to breathe, how to sit calmly and quietly, then you have your seatbelt and you're always safe."

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Self-Care Activity: **Breathing**

This breathing practice allows you to take a full deep breath. This calms your mind. You can use this practice to slow down your breathing so you can relax.

- Sit up straight in a comfortable chair with both feet on the floor.
- Breathe slowly and deeply through your nose.
- Breathe in. Breathe out.
- Breathing in, let your belly come outward.
- Breathing out, let your belly come back inward.
- Breathe out slowly.
- Let your breath flow out, fully and comfortably.
- You could think the sound *aah* as you breathe out.
- Imagine your breath as a smooth flowing stream.
- Gradually make your breath as quiet as you can.

Self-Care Tips: **Breathe**

- Be patient. Be kind with yourself. This gets easier with practice.
- Make breathing practice a habit. Add it to your daily routine.
- You can start your day with a few minutes of breathing to help you start the day feeling calm.
- You can end the day with a breathing practice to relax as you fall asleep.

Nourish Yourself

Eating good food and drinking plenty of water keeps your body healthy. Think about feeding your body.

I feel well when I eat ...

I get energy from eating foods like ...

If I wanted to eat a special treat, I would have ...

Positive thoughts help keep your mind healthy.

Think about feeding your mind.

I have good feelings when I think positive thoughts like ...

I feel strong when I think about ...

Self-Care Activity: **Nourish Your Body**

Eating is something we do everyday. The following activity helps you slow down the process and pay greater attention to what fuels your mind and body:

Pause before you eat. Sit still for a moment. Notice your sensations.

Let yourself **appreciate the food** that you will eat.

Before you begin, take **a few slow, deep breaths.**

Pay attention to what you are eating.

- What do you smell?
- What do you taste?
- Feel the texture of the food—is it soft or crunchy?

Pause again after you eat. Sit still for a moment.

Take **a few slow deep breaths.** This is time to rest and digest.

Self-Care Activity: **Nourish Your Mind**

This activity helps you focus specifically on positive thoughts.

Start with a pause.

Take a breath.

Calm your mind and body.

Begin by thinking of something that went right for you recently.

- Did someone say something nice to you?
- Was your bed comfortable?
- Did you enjoy your breakfast?
- Did something make you laugh?

Think of as many positive gifts and strengths as you can.

Move

Moving is important for self-care, for health, and for when you are feeling stressed.

Movement can be calming. During your daily activities, you move your head, neck, shoulders, hands, wrists, chest, hips, legs, and feet. You can add some extra movements, too. This will help keep your joints flexible.

Moving gets your blood flowing and helps you breathe more deeply. People who are active during the day often sleep better.

Movement tells your brain to stay alert. Over time, moving your body helps you stay healthy. Both energetic movement and very slow movement can improve your mood.

Self-Care Activity: **Move**

This activity is a series of 8 gentle stretches. Do these slowly, with awareness. Focus on your breathing while you are moving. Do each stretch 3 to 5 times.

To do this activity, sit up straight. If you can, put your feet on the floor.

1 *Head up and down*

- Breathe in as you look up.
- Breathe out as you look down.

2 *Head sideways*

- Breathe in.
- As you breathe out, tip your head to the right.
- Breathe in as you move your head back to upright.
- Breathe out, tip your head to the left, and then breathe in as you move back to upright.

3 *Turning neck*

- Breathe in. Keep your body facing straight ahead.
- As you breathe out, turn your head so you are facing to your right.
- Breathe in as you turn your head back to facing forwards.
- Breathe out, turning your head left. Breathe in back to forward.

4 *Neck rolls*

- Breathe out as you bring your chin toward your chest.
- As you breathe in, swoop your head up towards your left shoulder.
- Breathe out as you move your head down to center.
- Breathe in as you move your head up to your right shoulder.

5 *Turtle stretch*

- Look forward.
- As you breathe in, gently slide your chin forward.
- As you breathe out, gently slide your head straight back.

6 *Shoulder rotations*

- Raise your shoulders back then up towards your ears.
- Roll your shoulders forward and down.
- Reverse direction, rolling your shoulders forward then up toward your ears, then backwards and down.

7 *Overhead stretch*

- Breathing in, slowly raise both arms out to your sides and up as high as is comfortable for you.
- As you breathe out, slowly lower your arms to your sides.

8 *Side bends*

- As you breathe in, slowly raise both arms over your head.
- As you breathe out, slowly bend to the left, with arms up.
- Breathe in as you come back up.
- As you breathe out, slowly bend to the right.

9 *End with a pause.* Breathe deeply.



**“A good laugh and a long sleep
are two of the best cures for
anything.”**

— Irish Proverb

Sleep

Sleep has many important benefits for memory, mood, energy, and your overall physical health.

You probably know that too little sleep makes kids tired and cranky, but it makes adults tired and cranky, too!

At night, sleep helps you store and organize your memories. Your body heals during sleep. Too little sleep can make you more likely to get sick.

Self-Care Tips: Sleep

It is important to sleep and rest for your wellness. Many people who use the practices in this Guide say it's easier to go to sleep, stay asleep, or return to sleep after waking up in the night.

If you find that naps make it easier to get through the day, build them in. Try limiting nap time to 20-30 minutes.

If you wake up in the night and are having trouble going back to sleep, pause and breathe. Imagine your breath flowing up and down through your body as you breathe in and out.

Think thoughts that nourish your mind.

Creating Self-Care Moments

Pause. Breathe. Nourish yourself. Move. Sleep.

Putting it all together: These skills can help you manage better in tough times. You can use them daily, and whenever you feel overwhelmed.

Say one of these positive statements to yourself when you pause and breathe. Think positive thoughts while you eat and move. Remind yourself about what's going right when you are getting ready to sleep.

- I am doing the best I can.
- I accept that I will have difficult days from time to time.
- I am surrounded by people who love and support me.
- I can feel calm and peaceful.
- I am learning every day.

"It is not happiness that makes us grateful. It is gratefulness that makes us happy."

—David Steindl-Rast

Another positive statement I can say to myself:

Self-Care Activity: **Self-Care Moments**

- Read the category of self-care activities in the left-hand column.
- Choose at least one category and make a note about how you want to add this activity into your life.
- Add other things that will nourish you in the blank rows at the bottom.

Things I can do	How I want to do this
...build in a pause	
...practice breathing exercises	
...nourish my body	
...nourish my mind	
...move with awareness	
...stretch	
...do something just for me	

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