

The Complete Guide to Self-Care

200+ IDEAS FOR REDUCING STRESS AND INCREASING HAPPINESS




What Is Self-Care?

Self-care is the mindset, activities, and habits we regularly practice to reduce stress when we are feeling overwhelmed and to increase feelings of happiness on a daily basis. Self-care is not selfish or self-centered; it is critical to our overall wellbeing and the health of our relationships. Think of the safety warning before take-off in an airplane – the flight attendants always tell you to put on your oxygen mask first before you assist others. The reason behind this is simple: until our basic needs are met, we can do little to help others around us.


Another great way to think of self-care is to think of yourself as a glass of water. In order to share our fullest selves, we need to replenish our glass. One cannot pour from an empty cup.





Self-care looks different for everyone. A strategy or ritual that works for one person may not be effective for another. Self-care is unique in that we must explore many strategies and activities and find the ones that work best for our own individual needs. It can be helpful to think about the various facets of health in our lives; our emotional, mental, social, physical, and spiritual health can suffer if we do not practice habits that “refill our glass”.

The following list of ideas for self care is organized by these different kinds of health. If you are feeling particularly empty in one certain category, it might be helpful to focus your practice of self-care with ideas from that list for a while. If you find that your overall well-being needs a boost, you might consider sprinkling your self-care routine with ideas from each list. Nevertheless, it is important to strive for balance in all areas so we can lead happy, healthy lives and spread our “wealth” to those around us.



Emotional Self-Care




Emotional Self-Care


Emotional self-care is complex. It involves giving space to emotions that we often label as “negative” and allowing ourselves to feel overwhelmed, stressed, angry, upset, and frustrated. We must allow ourselves the time to feel the vast range of emotions that exist, and yet at the same time practice strategies so that those emotions don’t completely engulf our lives. When we practice emotional self-care, we are able to acknowledge the complexity and intensity of what we are feeling, label it, and manage it. Below are some ideas from a variety of sources to help you engage in emotional self-care.

Ideas for Emotional Self-Care



- Allow yourself to feel and express all of your feelings (in a safe and appropriate environment). For example, if you are angry, find a healthy outlet (like writing about your anger) rather than taking it out on your friends or family.
- Ask three good friends to give your positive feedback. What do they love about you?
- Dedicate a week to saying only positive things on your favorite social media channel.
- Learn breathing techniques to regulate stress and anxiety.
- Do one thing today because it makes you happy.
- Finish this sentence every day after you wake up: "I love myself because I"
- Have a good, long, cathartic cry.
- Try some mindful exercises to help bring you into the present moment.
- If you need a good, body-shaking cry, watch sad movies or listen to sad songs.
- Keep a running list of great things people say about you. Read it when you feel down.
- Try some adult coloring as a form of anxiety and/or stress release. This can also serve to help you focus, be more mindful and perhaps spark some creativity.

- 
- Look at yourself in the mirror and imagine that you're your best friend. What would you tell you right now?
 - Define only three daily goals. This makes goals achievable, while also allowing for normal "emergencies" at work that might take up your time.
 - Recite some self-love affirmations.
 - Need help coming up with new ideas? Create an inspirational collage and hang it in your workspace.
 - Read some feel-good poetry.
 - Write a list of the various things in life you're grateful for. Then post it somewhere you can see it often to help refocus your emotions when you feel down.
 - Revisit happier times by reading old emails, letters, or postcards from friends and family.
 - Give. Do it unconditionally, and with no strings attached. See how good it feels to help others without reciprocation.
 - Set photos of your loved ones as the wallpaper of your phone or laptop so you can look at them when you need inspiration.
 - Take a moment to name your emotions without judging them.
 - Learn to recognize your inner critic. Write yourself a letter of forgiveness for anything you are feeling guilty about.

- 
- Tell your pet all of your darkest secrets.
 - Unfollow or mute toxic “friends” in your social media feeds.
 - Tap into your creative side. Use painting or another creative art to release your fear, anxiety, anger, and frustration on paper.
 - Use 15 minutes to write out your thoughts about anything bothering you. Then burn or throw away the paper.
 - Remove any equipment or appliances that make you feel bad about yourself, such as a scale.
 - Clean up your work area or living space. (Many people find a clean and neat work area to be cathartic.)

Mental Self-Care



G, B, L, V, N, T, N


Mental Self-Care


Our brains are complicated muscles that need exercise and rest – just like our physical bodies! In our everyday lives, we are often overwhelmed by schoolwork, jobs, remembering important calendar dates and memorizing our to-do list. This can be taxing on one of our most important muscles! Mental self-care involves giving our brain the necessary break or stimulation it needs to keep it in tip top shape.


Ideas for Mental Self-Care



- Allow yourself to say "no" to tasks you do not have time for.
- Take "should" out of your vocabulary. Stop feeling you "should" be doing things.
- Take a nap without an alarm clock.
- Learn more about your local history.
- Challenge a negative thought with an opposite, positive thought.
- Take another route to work, or do a routine differently. Develop new neural pathways and keep your brain healthy by mixing up your routine in small ways.
- Learn how to make a budget and keep track of your money.
- Sew, quilt, or crochet something. Engage your hands.
- Try something new in your living space. Rearrange all of your furniture in a way that makes you more comfortable. When your home "looks" new, you receive constant new stimulus until your mind is completely settled with the new look.
- Write a limerick or a haiku that involves counting syllables.
- Develop an energizing morning ritual.
- Read fiction for an hour.
- Find a new hobby, or revisit an old one.

- 
- Intentionally schedule “me time” on your calendar or planner.
 - Reward yourself for completing small tasks.
 - Learn a new board game you’ve never played.
 - Get some inspiration by reading stories of people who overcame adversity.
 - Buy a coloring book and crayons. Adult coloring can be very therapeutic.
 - Goof or play around for five minutes several times throughout your day with a child or pet.
 - Catch up on your favorite blog.
 - Establish and stick to a routine. Your personal routine can be grounding in times when life seems chaotic.
 - Use online tutorials to learn something new (i.e., Photoshop)
 - Discover your stress indicators, such as mood swings, shortening temper, or feeling drained, overwhelmed, or angry. Use these “warning signs” to let you know you need “me time” and some self-care.
 - Listen to a podcast about a topic that interests you, but you have yet to explore.
 - Declutter your wardrobe. Every month, pick three clothes that you don’t love (or love least) and give them away.

- 
- Do something spontaneous.
 - If you are going through something, be it an illness or major life change, educate yourself by learning about what you're facing, what to expect, and where you can get support.
 - Clean up just one small corner of a room in your house. Tidying up can help calm our minds.
 - Learn the basics of a new language.
 - Learn something new. This could be a topic you've been interested in but have never taken the time to learn or reviewing news/articles related to your career.
 - If you're feeling overwhelmed, create a plan by listing out your three most important tasks and tackling them first.
 - Unplug from email and social media for an hour.
 - Read a magazine.
 - Unplug from email and social media for an hour or full day.
 - If you play an instrument, try learning a song from a genre or artist you don't usually listen to.
 - Take a mental health day.
 - Do some hardcore nesting and make your home or bedroom as cozy, beautiful, and comforting as possible.

- 
- Put the dishes away.
 - Fix a small annoyance that's been bothering you at home.
 - Visit the library or a bookstore. Browse or read at your pleasure.
 - Check your to-do list for something that's been there for ages, and get it done.
 - Declutter a room or a small space.
 - Write a review of a business you like. Spread some good will and positivity.
 - Develop a relaxing evening ritual.
 - Pick and read a book that's easy and fun, then give it away, perhaps to a younger person in your life.
 - Make your bed.
 - On days when you lack self-confidence, try on expensive suits and dresses at a local boutique and see how good you look.
 - Work on a jigsaw puzzle.
 - Listen to a chapter or two from an audiobook.
 - Make a Spotify playlist based on your current mood.
 - Start a journal to record your thoughts and experiences.


A photograph of two men performing pushups on a sandy beach. The man in the foreground is wearing a light blue t-shirt and is in a low, ready position with his hands on the sand. The man in the background is wearing a dark blue t-shirt and is also in a similar position. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The text "Physical Self-Care" is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the middle of the image.

Physical Self-Care


Physical Self-Care

Just like our brains, our physical bodies need both exercise and relaxation. There is a lot to be said for the mind-body connection: our physical and mental health are inextricably intertwined. The healthier we are on the outside directly impacts how we feel on the inside, and vice versa! Physical self-care involves moving our bodies on a daily basis, fostering a healthy relationship with food, and resting when we need it.

Ideas for Physical Self-Care



- Commit to attending an exercise class in your neighborhood.
- Get up out of your chair and dance to your favorite upbeat song.
- Do some stretching exercises.
- Find a new exercise style that you enjoy (Pilates, HIIT workouts, etc.) and find some free videos to practice on the internet.
- Do some quick, deep breathing exercises.
- Go for a quick walk around the block, or a longer stroll through your neighborhood.
- Find a yoga video on Youtube that interests you.
- Drink a glass of water every hour on the hour.
- Exhaust yourself physically. Do whatever helps you feel fatigued.
- Get a massage.
- Go out and spend 10 minutes under the sun (with sunscreen!)
- Go for a bike ride to nowhere in particular.
- Go hiking, camping, or backpacking and spend some time in nature.
- Go kayaking or canoeing with a friend.
- Go swim for fun.

- 
- Go to bed early. Aim to get at least 8 hours of sleep.
 - Go up and down the stairs three times.
 - Find a new recipe that includes a vegetable you haven't tried yet.
 - If possible, don't order fast food for a week.
 - Cook a dinner at home with a family member or friend.
 - Commit to learning one new healthy recipe per week.
 - Know and use your self-soothing activities, like stroking your arm or leg, petting a dog, or sipping hot tea.
 - Scream, pound pillows, tear up paper, or shake your body to move the energy out.
 - Allow yourself to sleep in on weekends. Life can be hectic.
 - Slow dance for 30 minutes.
 - Roll it out. The benefits of foam rollers on the body are big. This speeds healing and muscle regrowth, and just makes you feel awesome.
 - Take a long shower, dry your hair, and put on clothes that make you feel good.
 - Walk the dog.
 - Visit the beach and breathe in the fresh air.

A photograph showing three hands holding ice cream cones against a blurred green background. The hand on the left is light-skinned and holds a cone with a pink wrapper and a scoop of vanilla ice cream. The middle hand is also light-skinned and holds a cone with a yellow wrapper and a scoop of chocolate ice cream. The hand on the right is dark-skinned and holds a cone with a yellow wrapper and a scoop of vanilla ice cream. The text "Social Self-Care" is overlaid in a white, cursive font across the center of the image.

Social Self-Care


Social Self-Care

Relationships play a huge role in our overall well-being. Some relationships can fill us up and bring happiness into our lives, and others can have a detrimental effect on our mood and can be very unhealthy for us. Social self-care involves knowing yourself, your boundaries, when you need time for yourself, and when you need to reach out to others for positive socialization. It is about maintaining healthy relationships and authentically connecting with other human beings.

Ideas for Social Self-Care



- Accompany a friend or family member while they run errands or attend events.
- Ask for help when you need a little extra support.
- Ask friends and family to remind you that things will be OK, and that what you're feeling is temporary.
- Call a friend or family member you care about, just to say hi.
- Call a trusted friend or family member and talk things out.
- Choose who you spend your time with today. Spend time with people who are enthusiastic and positive.
- Converse positively with someone in customer service.
- Cuddle someone or something. Don't be afraid to ask for it!
- Dress your pet in a silly costume and show them around to make others smile.
- Go out in public and people-watch in a park or city block.
- Tell someone near you what you appreciate or like about them.
- Have a picnic with family or friends.
- Host a family movie night over the weekend.
- Intentionally reconnect with someone you've lost touch with or have unresolved conflict with.

- 
- Join a support group for people who are going through what you're going through. Share and listen.
 - Leave a funny voicemail for someone you care about.
 - Make cookies or brownies and give them away to a neighbor, family member, or friends.
 - Post some dorky #ThrowbackThursday pictures of you from childhood and ask friends to do the same.
 - Schedule a regular date night with your significant other.
 - Seek out models of inspiration and read their stories.
 - Send a surprise care package to someone you love.
 - Send a letter or a postcard to someone far away.
 - Share a kind smile with strangers on your way to and from school or work.
 - Sit down and start a genuine conversation with a trusted friend or family member about things that are going well, things you're having a hard time with, or things you are grateful for.
 - Treat a family member out to a meal out.
 - Take your dog or a friend's dog for a walk.
 - Allow yourself to say "No" to plans and stay home.



Spiritual Self-Care


Spiritual Self-Care

Spiritual self-care involves connecting our internal selves with the outside world, and opening our minds to a greater perspective. Remember, self-care looks different for everyone, and spiritual self-care is no different. Everyone has different views and values to act on. Here are some general ideas that can enhance your spiritual self-care, no matter what you believe in.

Ideas for Spiritual Self-Care



- Make time for meditation in your day.
- Learn the body scan technique to check in with each part of your body.
- Do several one-minute body awareness meditations.
- Try a thought awareness meditations throughout the day to check in with your feelings and emotions.
- Do something nice for someone in secret.
- Donate money to a charity or cause of your choosing.
- Open a door, carry a bag, or feed someone's parking meter.
- Intentionally find five unexpected beautiful things on your way to school or work.
- Pay mindful attention to the things you do during your morning and evening routine.
- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Share with someone less fortunate, be it some extra lunch or clothes you no longer want.
- Sit somewhere green and be still and quiet for a few minutes.
- Go outside and connect with nature in a way that is meaningful to you.

- 
- Take a break from social media by deleting or deactivating it.
 - Soften your expectations of you and others. Acknowledge a difficult situation a person might be in.
 - Express your thoughts by free writing in a journal.
 - Empathize. Try to understand why others think, feel, and react differently. Put yourself in their shoes and identify feelings you might have if you were in a similar situation.
 - Visit or volunteer at your local animal rescue.
 - Try random acts of kindness.
 - Volunteer at a local shelter, hospital, or nursing home. Be of service to others.
 - Listen to a podcast or read an article about a topic you do not quite understand yet. Expand your perspective.
 - Read about something relevant to a culture or background you are not familiar with.
 - Listen to music that brings you joy.
 - What are you good at? Find an opportunity to use that strength today.

*Additional Ideas
for Self-Care*



More Ideas for Self-Care



- Go on a two-day holiday for the weekend.
- Allow yourself to fantasize and daydream.
- Attend a local high school sporting event.
- Bake something just for fun.
- Book a night in a fancy hotel. Take a bubble bath. Get room service. Relax.
- Build something with Legos.
- Buy a fun treat when grocery shopping.
- Buy some flowers that delight you.
- Cook a fancy French meal or have fun cooking delicious pre-made meals at home.
- Create a piece of art. It could be a poem, song, or painting.
- Eat your favorite comfort foods.
- Give yourself a manicure or pedicure.
- Go out to see a movie at your favorite theater, all by yourself.
- Call an old friend and discuss fun memories together.

More Ideas for Self-Care




- Go to an antique shop or a museum.
- Go to the farmer's market.
- Splurge on a new skin care product.
- Walk someplace with a nice view of the sunset.
- Order in dinner.
- Plan out an extravagant vacation for fun. (You don't need to follow through. Planning is where the fun is.)
- Put on a homemade face mask.
- Read comic strips that you enjoy.
- Read some inspirational quotes.
- Revisit your favorite books from childhood
- Sing at the top of your lungs.
- Sit in a coffee shop and enjoy the ambiance.
- Start a blog and write absolutely anything.
- Look at the stars and identify the constellations.
- Enjoy the sunrise or sunset.

More Ideas for Self-Care



- Use aromatherapy.
- Treat yourself. Spend a little money and buy a small luxury.
- Watch a movie you have been wanting to see.
- Watch a couple episodes of your favorite sitcom.
- Watch funny Youtube videos.
- Allow yourself a “Netflix day.”
- Watch or listen to your favorite comedy podcasts.
- Watch your favorite classic films.
- Wear an outfit that makes you feel great.
- Wrap yourself up in a cozy blanket and sip a cup of hot tea while reading a book.
- Create a playlist of songs that soothe and calm you.
- Do some gardening. Dig your hands into the dirt and enjoy the feeling.
- Find a shop with tea, coffee, or spices and enjoy the free smells for a while.
- Go to an art museum.
- Lie down on the ground for a few minutes and breathe.



*Do whatever brings
you peace.*

Thank You!

A. Battista



Special thanks to S.J. Scott and contributors at DevelopGoodHabits.org for the variety of self-care ideas that went into this guide