

# Nurturing Well-being: Why Prioritizing Self-Care Is Essential

“Self-care” has become a buzzword, used to describe everything from serene bubble baths to delectable desserts. But self-care isn’t a reward, coping strategy, or right you must earn. It’s about meeting your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs with habits that shield against stress and cultivate resilience.

Far from being selfish, taking care of yourself is a vital practice that benefits not only you but also those around you. Self-care practices allow you to show up as your best self when loved ones, friends, and co-workers need you the most.

## What is self-care?

The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) defines self-care as the “ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability.” It’s a wellness tool for all aspects of life and doesn’t require expense or extravagance. It can be as simple as:

- Getting enough sleep
- Exercising regularly
- Eating balanced meals
- Staying hydrated
- Keeping your mind active
- Engaging in a meaningful spiritual practice

## Understanding the types of self-care

[Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy](#) emphasizes fulfilling needs in this order: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. This hierarchy can help guide your self-care plan, addressing various aspects of your well-being. Here are a few examples of self-care:

### Physical self-care examples:

- Eat balanced meals
- Prioritize sleep
- Exercise regularly
- Get regular health check-ups

### Emotional self-care examples:

- Acknowledge and express emotions without judgment
- Share feelings with people you trust
- Participate in activities that bring joy

#### **Social self-care examples:**

- Nurture friendships
- Spend time with family
- Engage in community activities

#### **Mental health self-care examples:**

- Keep your mind active
- Challenge negative thoughts
- Practice gratitude
- Access mental health care

#### **Spiritual self-care examples:**

- Develop a meaningful spiritual practice
- Focus on personal meaning and fulfillment

## **Why is self-care important?**

Life's demands can be overwhelming, making it crucial to prioritize self-care. Benefits of self-care include:

### **1. Stress reduction**

Self-care builds resilience against stress. Taking care of yourself can help lower stress and protect against challenges like burnout. Self-care may also reduce compassion fatigue and increase satisfaction for people in caretaking or relational professions like teachers, mental health professionals, and health care workers.

### **2. Improved mental health**

Self-care practices can ease anxiety, stress, and depression and boost feelings of happiness and well-being.

### **3. Better work performance**

While many of the factors that drive burnout are out of your control, practicing self-care can help you better manage stress and overwhelm.

### **4. Good quality of life**

Perhaps the biggest benefit of self-care is that it improves our lives. Each of us only has one life to live, and we all deserve goodness, peace, joy, and well-being. If you're feeling tired, overwhelmed, resentful, lonely, or unable to cope, or you're struggling to concentrate or find purpose, these may be signs that self-care is needed.

## Crafting your self-care plan

In our always-on-the-go culture, prioritizing our needs can be challenging, but it's essential to learn how to practice self-care.

### Step 1: Identify your most urgent needs.

You may choose to tackle basics like sleeping and eating first, or you may choose to prioritize relationships and a sense of meaning. Ask yourself:

1. Are your current forms of self-care working?
2. How's your work-life balance?
3. Do you take regular breaks at work?
4. Do you have a healthy diet, exercise routine, and sleep schedule?
5. Do you spend time with people you enjoy?
6. Do you engage in spiritual practices that feel fulfilling?

### Step 2: Formulate a self-care plan by writing down goals, intentions, or a vision.

Envision how your life would improve if your self-care needs were met. What emotions would you experience? What positive changes would you see?

### Step 3: Identify actionable steps toward your goal, starting small.

For instance, commit to drinking two more glasses of water per day or taking a daily 10-minute walk during lunch.

## Putting your self-care plan into action

Integrating self-care into your routine shouldn't feel like another task on your to-do list. Here are strategies to create healthy self-care habits:

**Link habits:** Associate new self-care habits with existing ones. For example, pair increased water intake with your morning coffee or place affirmations next to your toothbrush for daily positivity.

**Evaluate coping strategies:** Assess whether current coping mechanisms are nurturing or counterproductive. Replace unhealthy habits with self-care practices that enhance your quality of life. For example, instead of watching three episodes of your favorite show, watch one episode, then go for a walk or call a friend.

**Monitor and adjust:** Observe how you feel before and after trying new strategies. Adjust your self-care plan as you discover what works best for you.

**Learn from others:** Ask friends and loved ones for self-care tips, and consider consulting a mental health coach or therapist. Your workplace may have resources that can help, too.

## Self-care ideas to get you started

Here are a few self-care ideas to kickstart your journey:

- [Set boundaries](#)
- Ask others for help
- Talk with a trusted friend or loved one
- Prioritize physical and mental health check-ups
- Schedule alone time
- Spend time outdoors
- Take a class that interests you
- Pick up a new hobby
- Take a break from social media or the news

## You deserve this

The importance of self-care can't be understated. Self-care isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Your needs are valid, spanning from the basics of healthy food and sleep to the mental and emotional realms of [finding meaning and purpose](#). Remember, small changes can make a big difference. Start slow, fine-tune your plan, and embrace a life that's fulfilling and enjoyable.

### Make self-care a priority

You can start your journey today if your employer or school offers Lyra.

[Sign up now](#)

#### About the author

Dr. Reiser is a licensed clinical psychologist with a background in educator and counselor training and development. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in counseling psychology from the University of Texas at Austin and specializes in evidence-based psychotherapy and measurement-based care, with a research focus on occupational stress and coping.