



SELF-CARE

A client once told me about his history of managing anxiety. I asked him, what he did to relax. After thinking about it for a while, he told me he liked to fish. I asked him what it is about fishing that he likes so much. He replied, 'I enjoy being out in nature. I like hearing the waves lap against the boat, the thrill of catching a fish is the bonus, but I really like the peace the quiet.' I then asked him when he last went fishing. After some thought, he replied, 'seven years ago'. We agreed that seven years was a long time given that it was one of his favourite relaxation activities.

– Professor Kathryn von Treuer, Psychologist Cairnmillar Institute

Self-care

Self-care involves taking care of your own physical, emotional and mental health. It is a commitment that you make to yourself, and it involves making healthy choices to protect your own physical and emotional wellbeing.

The nice thing about self-care is that it looks a little different for everyone. You don't need to sit under a pyramid for 20 mins at 5am to get it done. You also don't need to go fishing, if fishing isn't your thing. Self-care is all about paying attention to yourself and giving yourself time to do some of the things that make you happy.

Even if you are time-poor at the moment, taking just two minutes every hour to do some breathing exercises can really help. Over the longer term, it's

about finding activities that fit in with your lifestyle and are easy to commit to. Before we think through some helpful tips and strategies that you may find useful for self-care, let's take a moment to think about what self-care is and what it is not.

- **Self-care is an intentional way of living** in which we align our values, attitudes and behaviours with our daily routines. It is not an 'emergency response plan' for feeling overwhelmed.
- **Self-care is about seeing yourself as being worthy of care.** It is not about being selfish or acting selfishly.
- **Self-care involves 'letting go' rather than 'doing more'.** This may look like cutting back on unnecessary commitments, letting go of unhealthy behaviours or limiting time with people or activities that leave us feeling worried, stressed, or unhappy.

Why is self-care important?

Self-care has the following benefits:

- **Improved mental health** – including emotional regulation and preventing a depression relapse
- **Better stress management** – reducing the negative effects of stress and increasing your mood and energy levels.
- **Healthier relationships** – maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help you understand yourself and those around you a lot better.
- **Improved productivity** – better self-care can help you focus on your goals and concentrate on what you are doing.
- **Better physical health** – reducing your stress levels leads to a stronger immune system and helps you feel more physically able.
- **Increased self-esteem** – self-care can help you filter out negative thoughts and help you to feel better about yourself.

Self-care tips

While self-care can be different for everyone, the following tips work well for most people:

- **Get enough sleep** – 7-8 hours of sleep every night gives your body time to rest and renew. Daytime naps are also great for refreshing your body and improving concentration levels.
- **Eat well** – the foods you eat ultimately impact your energy, mood and productivity levels. Pay attention to what you are eating and take the time to nutritious foods that keep you full and focused for longer.
- **Exercise regularly** – go for a run or walk.
- **Meditate or do deep breathing** for a few minutes; this can help produce a sense of calmness.
- **Stretch** – spending 5-10 minutes stretching those muscles helps your mind and body.

- **Start a journal** – write down what you are grateful for and what is on your mind.
- **Have a relaxing bath or shower** – being in the water and caring for your body can be very calming.
- **Watch a movie or read a book** that you enjoy.
- **Learn something new**, perhaps try something you are interested in, take a class or join a group.
- **De-clutter your living or working space** – this can feel good and help you focus.
- **Get creative** – perhaps write, make or paint something that gets your creative energy out.

Self-care if you are caring for others

If you are caring for or helping others, self-care is especially important. We need to be at our best when we take care of others because it improves the quality of care that we can give. It also models the importance of self-care to others. Make sure you take time each day to do something healthy and enjoyable for yourself. Go and take that walk, listen to some happy music, or do the exercise class whenever you can.

Further information

If you find self-care difficult or if you are having trouble managing your stress levels, you can find help here: Cairnmillar Institute www.cairnmillar.org.au

For more information on the benefits of mindfulness, take a look at: www.healthdirect.gov.au/benefits-of-mindfulness