

Building Your Self-Care Action Plan

Self-care is a term we are all becoming more familiar with, but what is it really? We may associate self-care with things like spa treatments or yoga. While these are healthy activities, self-care is so much more. Self-care involves any action taken to improve and maintain your physical and mental health. It's something we need to do to achieve overall improved wellbeing.

When building your self-care plan, consider the *7 Pillars of Self-Care* defined by the [International Self-Care Foundation \(ISF\)](#):

Knowledge and health literacy. The more you know, the better choices you'll make. The World Health Organization website is a great place to learn about many health topics such as addictive behaviors, food safety, oral health, sexually transmitted diseases, tobacco, and vaccines.

Mental wellbeing, self-awareness and agency. Make sure to take regular breaks from your workday, even just to get up for 10 minutes and stretch. Make time for you. Find an activity that you enjoy and schedule it into your calendar just as you would any other important appointment. Social interaction is vital to our mental wellbeing. Connect regularly with friends and loved ones by phone or video call.

Physical activity. Getting 150 minutes of moderate cardio activity per week may seem daunting. But finding an activity you enjoy—walking, dancing, riding a bike—will help the time pass easily. Your regular chores, such as mowing the lawn, can also count toward your activity. If you've been sedentary for a while, start out slowly and try to build some physical activity into your daily self-care plan and increase it over time.

Healthy eating. Aim for a balanced diet, including lots of fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. Avoid saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars. Start by meeting with your doctor or a nutritionist to discuss your dietary needs and develop a healthy eating plan.

Risk avoidance and mitigation. Getting regular checkups as recommended by your doctor can help prevent illness. Stay informed about your risk factors for conditions such as heart disease and cancer so that you can take steps to mitigate the risks. Part of your self-care plan should include regular screenings, such as blood tests and dental and vision screenings as well as accident prevention, such as wearing sunscreen and driving safely.

Good hygiene. We've heard a great deal about hygiene lately due to the pandemic—proper handwashing, covering our mouths when we cough or sneeze, and proper cleaning of surfaces. Good hygiene also pertains to bathing, dental care, and food safety. All of these measures are a part of a robust self-care plan.

Rational and responsible use of self-care products and services. A spa treatment or a yoga session may be a nice addition to your self-care plan, but self-care tools also include more basic things like making sure prescription medications are used as prescribed. Other products and services that can be a part of your plan can include virtual fitness sessions, taking your vitamins and supplements, and using home diagnostic tools such as a blood pressure cuff. Be sure the products and services meet quality and safety standards and are appropriate for your needs. If in doubt, check with your doctor.

Give yourself permission to take time out for yourself and start your self-care plan of action today.

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