SELF-CARE PLANNING GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUALS

A GUIDE TO CREATING
A DAY OF SELF-CARE

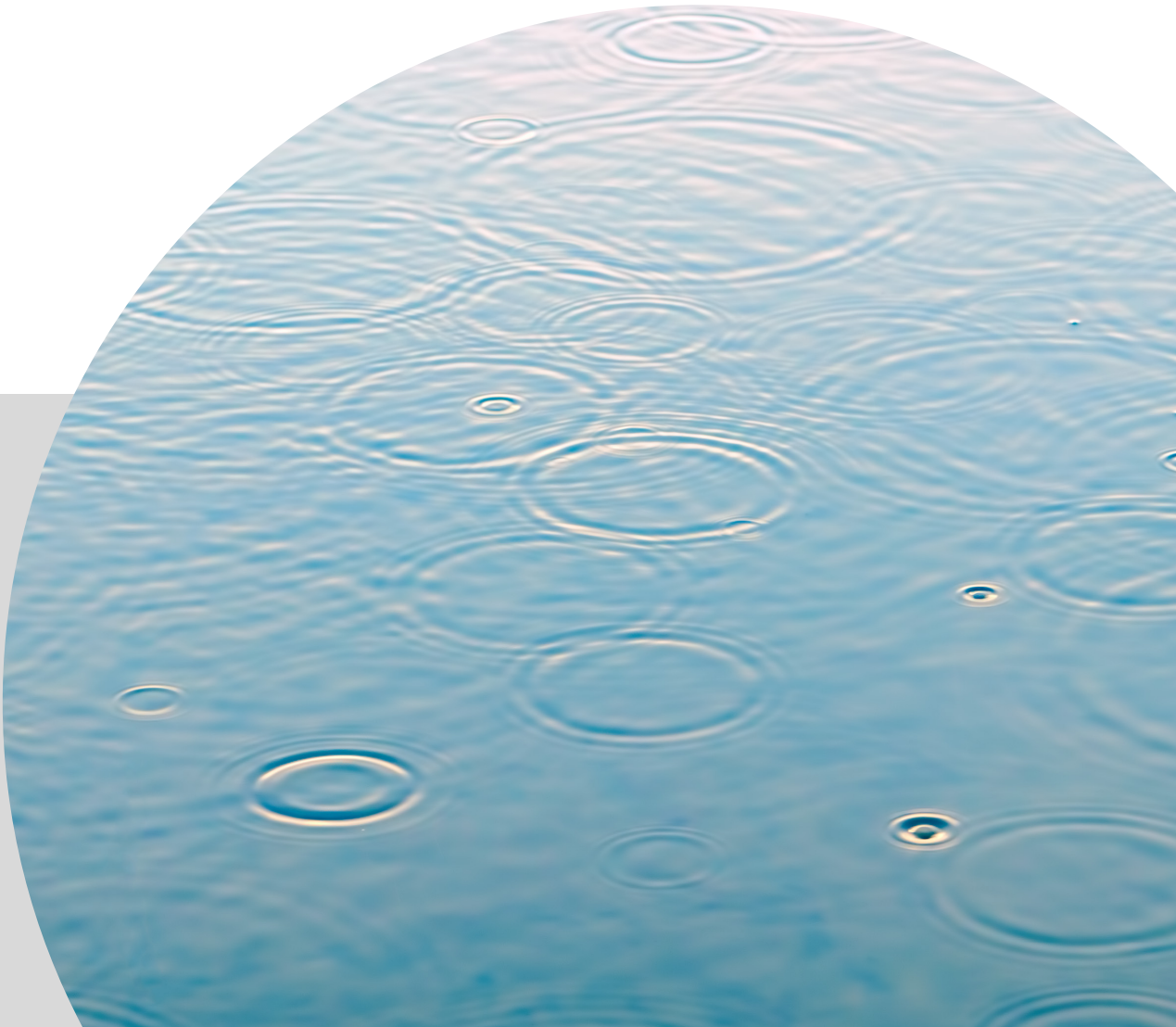


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WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care refers to the rituals and intentional activities one does to benefit your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.



It is easy to become consumed by the chaos of the world and neglect your own needs. But doing so compromises your ability to function properly. It is not selfish to take care of yourself, even when things get busy. In fact, it might be more important to do so at that time.

Self-care maintenance prevents us from succumbing to things like burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue in addition to various illnesses. [1]

The goal of self-care is to improve your overall mindfulness and stress resiliency. Regular practice is needed in order to maintain and promote mental wellness. You'll find a template and instructions on the following pages to assist in creating your personalized self-care plan.

My Weekly Self-Care

Areas of Care	Current Practices	New Practices
Physical		
Emotional		
Mental		
Spiritual		

Areas of Care	Current Practices	New Practices
Relationships		
Work		

Existing Barriers to Self-Care	How to Address Barriers

Top Three Coping Strategies

1.

2.

3.

CREATING YOUR SELF-CARE PLAN

Although everyone might experience similar effects from being overworked and overwhelmed, each person's self-care plan is unique to them.



1

First, identify your current coping methods when faced with stress. Divide them into healthy coping methods and the not-so-healthy methods. [2]

Healthy Methods:

- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Taking a walk
- Hitting the gym
- Painting

Not-So-Healthy Methods

- Yelling/acting aggressively
- Binge eating
- Smoking
- Skipping meals
- Drinking
- Pacing

Now you're able to more clearly see the habits you want to weed out and the ones you'd like to build on.



2

Identify your personal needs and desires. During this exercise, take a moment to consider what you value and need in your life every week. Then consider these needs in the event of a crisis. Develop categories for each of these items (e.g., physical, psychological, spiritual).[2]

On the next three pages, you will find templates you can use for this exercise.

As you create your chart, establish two separate columns: one for existing practices and another for the practices you'd like to incorporate going forward. As you write down whatever strategies you're using now, you'll begin to notice what areas are being taken care of better than others.

Identifying these deficits allows you to consider self-care strategies specific to those neglected areas.

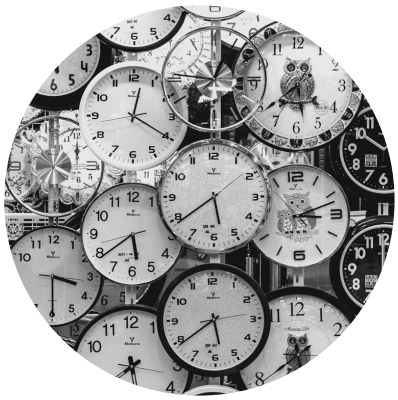


3

Evaluate barriers in two areas. First, consider what obstacles may be preventing you from taking better care of yourself in the neglected areas. Once you'are able to identify them, then you can create strategies to reduce, eliminate, or work around those barriers. [2]

Now consider what barriers could impact the new self-care skills you'd like to implement. Create strategies for overcoming these as well.







During this process, the goal is to remove barriers to encourage using new and healthy coping skills while eliminating unhealthy methods.



4

Create your self-care plan. Now that you have identified your barriers, write them into your self-care template. This will serve as a constant reminder of what normally prevents you from prioritizing your personal care. Then you're more likely to actively think about bypassing those obstacles. [2]

Finalize your self-care strategies.

For some people, goals are much more likely to be fulfilled when they're written down. Write your plan, envision yourself sticking to it, and then exercise some of the activities.

PERSONAL RETREAT DAY

As a sustaining practice, self-care occurs regularly, finding itself in small actions incorporated into your daily routine. Sometimes, though, you need *more* – when you find yourself recovering from a traumatic event or period of intense suffering, when you begin resenting your work, or when you are experiencing physical symptoms in response to high levels of stress and trauma exposure.



As both a preventative and deeply renewing practice, an intentional day of personalized self-care and rest can revitalize the spirit. A day of rest, or even simply an afternoon of planned self-care, is recommended to be incorporated into regular self-care practice.

Because it may be difficult attend a day or weekend self-care retreat, this section will assist you in developing your own personal retreat. This day has no lofty goals to meet, rather it is simply an intentional day of caring for yourself, full of the practices, rituals, and treats that make you feel most whole. It's a day of nurturing yourself as you would nurture a beloved child. As you plan your individual self-care retreat, go through each of the following sections and build your day.

Get it on the calendar.

How much time do you have for your personal retreat? A full day is ideal but not always practical. Could a 4-hour block of your morning or afternoon suffice? An afternoon is preferable, as you do not have to return to work afterward. Can you use time you already have off to schedule your retreat, such as a holiday or weekend? Can you take a personal day for your self-care?

Now that you've found a date and time, add it to your calendar and share it with people who may typically contact you during this period. Ask that they avoid disturbing you during your retreat.





Prepare your boundary markers and intentions.

Next, consider boundary markers, guide posts, and intentions for your day. By doing so, you are priming yourself for an experience that aligns with your hopes for the day.

Boundary Markers are like drawing a line in the sand, stating what will not be welcomed as a way of protecting and caring for oneself. They are the ground rules that promote health and safety. When defining your boundaries for your day of self-care, you may say “no” to activities that are part of your regular day-to-day life that need a moment of pause.

Examples of potential boundary markers for your self-care day:

- I will put my phone on Airplane Mode and won't call or text anyone.
- I will not check my work or personal email.
- I will not get on social media.
- I will not think about or dwell on my family or work.



It is important to note these boundaries may not work for everyone, and you are encouraged to write your own. Additionally, setting a time to make a phone call to someone you love may be part of your self-care plan. If you choose not to use your phone on your self-care day, consider creating an emergency plan so that you can be contacted if absolutely necessary. Sharing your agenda for the day with an emergency contact is a way to prepare for this.

Intention, as described by Wayne Dyer in *The Power of Intention*, is "a strong purpose or aim, accompanied by a determination to produce a desired result." Similar to goals, yet they are more focused on embodying a way of being and experiencing the world, rather than achieving and accomplishing tasks. Additionally, they are connected to a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life. Your intentions should be specific to you and the person you hope to become.

Examples of potential intentions for the duration of your self-care day:

- I will be content not being an expert at my self-care practices.
- I will listen to my body and give it what it needs.
- I will celebrate myself for just being me.
- I will put my needs before others today.



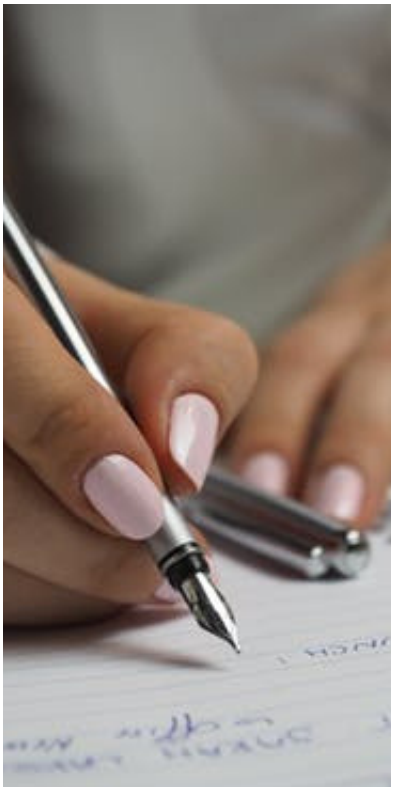
Choose how to spend your time.

Okay, you've scheduled time for your self-care day. Now what? So you don’t show up to your own retreat day without anything to do, begin considering how you’d like to intentionally spend your time. Reflect on restful activities you’ve been putting off trying, hobbies you enjoy but don't have enough time for, and listen to what your body needs.

Refer to the "Putting Self-Care into Practice" section of this guide for various practices you can incorporate into your day. You are encouraged to use that section as a starting point for cultivating ideas, but know that they are not the only practices for self-care. Try on some of the practices that intrigue *you*, but also look beyond this guide for activities you find restful and rejuvenating. If you know you do not like yoga or meditation, do not engage in these activities just because they are commonly thought to be what self-care gurus do.

Self-care may also look like activities beyond what traditionally comes to mind when thinking about self-care. It also could include therapy or coaching, setting boundaries in relationships, and removing toxic people and behaviors from one’s life. Depending on where you are in your journey and self-care practice, these activities may or may not be part of your self-care retreat day.

Create a loose agenda.



Example **Agenda**

8 Wake up

9 Breakfast at home

10 Light exercise

11 Massage

12 Meditate & journal

1 Order lunch

2 Paint

4 Read & write poetry

5 Therapy session

6 Dinner with a friend

Do not wake up on the day of your self-care retreat and let the day unfold without any premeditated plan. Conversely, do not over-schedule your day, jam packing every moment with “restful” activities. Create a loose agenda that can guide your day while allowing you to incorporate and prepare for different practices you hope to engage in. By creating a plan, you are ensuring you will get to engage in the activities and practices you enjoy.

Some people might want to incorporate massages, manicures, therapy sessions, or coffee with a friend as part of their self-care day. For these activities, schedule appointments beforehand – don’t expect that you’ll be accepted as a walk-in client or you're friend will be available on a moment's notice.

Based on your plan, gather all materials before your day of rest. If you want to purchase a new bath bomb or face mask, do so before you’re ready to use it. If you plan to get crafty, ensure you have the supplies you need. Remove all barriers that may stop you from engaging in the activities you enjoy or are eager to try.

Additionally, decide what you will eat before the day arrives to take away any stress of the day. Will you choose to be mindful of your food choices and where it was sourced? Or could indulging in a glass of wine or enjoying a scoop of ice cream be what your body needs? There are no rules on this day. Listen to your body and nourish it well.

Prepare your setting.

Once you've drafted your agenda, ask yourself, "Where will I be spending most of my time?" Consider creating a peaceful setting that ignites the senses if you will be at home or another venue where you can alter your setting. This includes:

- Creating soft lighting with lamps, string lights, or dimmed lighting
- Adding scents, by lighting candles or using an aromatherapy diffuser
- Gathering soft blankets and pillows for lounging
- Playing calming music
- Wearing comfortable clothing
- Bringing natural elements indoors, such as flowers or greenery and shells or rocks
- Using chimes, incense, or a singing bowl









After your self-care day, reflect on your guide posts.

Guide Posts are the lights on your path that let you know you are headed in the right direction–toward the fulfillment of your intentions. They assure you that you're moving forward, towards health, wholeness, and renewal. Guide posts cannot be planned, rather they are discovered through self-reflection, and then marked as a moment in time to later remember as an experience of hope and self-care. You take your guide posts with you after your day of self-care, and use them to continue to light your path forward.



Examples of potential guide posts upon reflection of self-care day:

- I wrote in my journal freely and didn't judge my writing for grammatical or spelling errors.
- I allowed myself to feel sad and cry without suppressing my emotions or holding back my tears.
- I listened to my body and gave myself time to truly rest and relax.
- I spent money on myself without feeling guilty.

PUTTING SELF-CARE INTO PRACTICE

This section provides examples for self-care practices to incorporate into your own routine. You're encouraged to try on different activities to discover what brings you a greater sense of wholeness and rest.

Reading Poetry

This list provides a starting point for an exploration of poetry. In your practice, consider reading the poem multiple times, reading it aloud, journaling the feelings that arise from the poem, or contemplating words or phrases that were especially potent to you.



- "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou
- "Sometimes" by David Whyte
- "We Stand at the Edge" by Barbara Rohde
- "The Gift" by Zoraida Rivera Morales
- "Human Existence On Earth" by Julius Babarinsa
- "The Healers" by Laurence Binyon
- "The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry
- "Sleep Peacefully" by Alfonsina Storni
- "Peace of Mind" by Robert M. Hensel
- "The Journey" by Mary Oliver
- "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver
- "Happiness Makes Up in Height For What It Lacks in Length" by Robert Frost

Creative Activities

Paint on a canvas or with watercolors . Freely sculpt out of clay or Play-Doh. Play an instrument, even if you get the notes wrong. Create your own vision board with visuals from magazines. Complete coloring pages. ProTip: Use a coloring app if you don't have art supplies.





Create a mask to represent yourself or your soul as you perceive it when you are actively helping someone or participating in your career. Paint another mask to represent yourself and your contentment with where you are in life right now.

Create a gratitude tree by taking sticks and placing them in a mason jar to create your tree. Decorate the jar as you'd like. Next, cut out leaf shapes from colored paper. Write the things you are grateful for in your life on individual leaves and tie them to the tree.



This activity was adapted from Lijo Decor and can be found at http://www.lijodecor.com/site/Thanksgiving-Ideas.html

Journaling



Get your favorite journal or a few sheets of paper and begin journaling. The following prompts can be used to get you started. Don't judge what you write, simply let your thoughts flow from your pen.

Some prompts to consider:

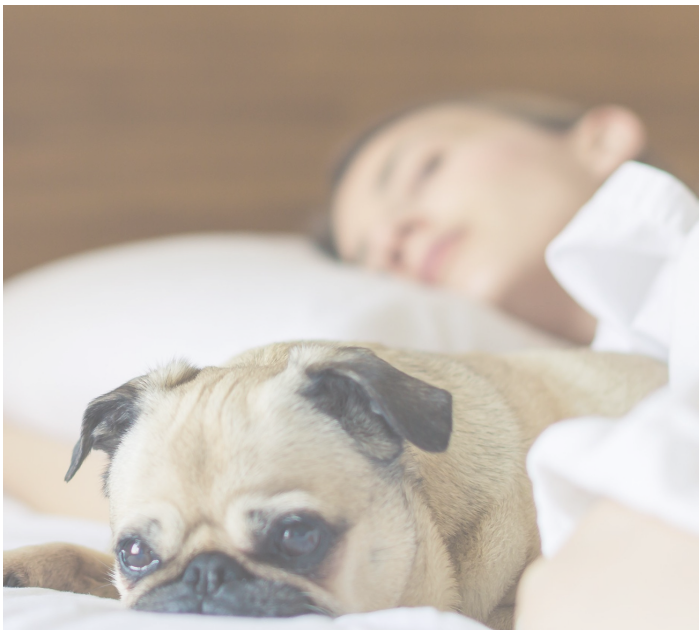
- I feel most alive when...
- I feel most like myself when...
- I am grateful for...
- My favorite thing about myself is...
- The work I must do for my soul to feel fulfilled is...

Write down a list of guiding principles or values that you live by. Then, add any others that you would like to incorporate into your life. Reflect on why these are important to you.

Create a “say no” list. Consider small adjustments you can make to live a more restful life. Next, make a “say yes” list. What things are life giving and should be absorbed into your life?

Improve Sleep Hygiene

According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep is crucial for the body's recovery and ability to perform at its mental and physical best. It is recommended that an adult between the ages of 18 and 64 get 7-9 hours of sleep per night.[3]



Consider using your self-care day to discover what habits you can employ to improve your sleep hygiene.

- **Limit caffeine after 2 pm.** Caffeine, and other stimulants impact quality of sleep, even if you don't feel more energized.
- **Get moving.** Aerobic exercise can improve sleep quality. Being active during the day can make it easier to fall asleep at night.
- **Watch what you eat around bedtime.** Heavy, fatty, fried, and spicy dishes can make it difficult to sleep by triggering heartburn and indigestion in some people.
- **Create a bedtime ritual.** A nightly routine can trigger the body to recognize it is time to prepare for sleep. In addition to brushing teeth, consider bathing, applying lotion, reading, or journaling before bed. Diffuse, spray, or topically apply quality lavender essential oil as it has calming and soothing properties.
- **Create a pleasurable sleep experience.** Consider using blackout curtains or eye shades to create a dark room. Consider whether quiet or white noise promotes your optimal sleep, and add ear plugs, noise machines, humidifiers, or a fan to your bedtime ritual.
- **Limit screen time in bed.** Enjoying screen time in bed can impact the production of the hormone melatonin which maintains proper circadian rhythms and promotes deep, restorative sleep.

Connect with Nature

Being immersed in nature can be incredibly healing. If you choose to include an outdoor component to your self-care, review the weather beforehand so you are prepared.

Some activities to connect with nature include:



- Hike at a local state park
- Walk around or sit in the park
- Take an activity outdoors, such as reading, journaling, eating, or meditating
- Cultivate your garden or volunteer at a community garden
- If the weather is poor, bring nature indoors with green plants and flowers

Additional Practices

Not all self-care feels indulgent. When planning your personal retreat, remember these activities are self-care too.

- Complete a puzzle. Try the Jigsaw Puzzle app if you don't have a physical puzzle.
- Take a 30 minute nap.
- Try a new recipe in the kitchen or bake your favorite dessert.
- Walk the dog.
- Watch an hour of television, but do not binge.
- Lift weights.
- Turn on music and dance.
- Enjoy an hour of silence.
- Love on the dogs and cats at the animal shelter.

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

References

1. Patel, A., & Patel, H. (2014). Promoting self care in the community: The evidence and why it is important. *The Pharmaceutical Journal*. doi:10.1211/pj.2014.11137908

2. Self-Care Starter Kit. *Homewood Health*. Retrieved January 14, 2019, from https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellbeing/files/wellbeing/self-care-starter-kit.pdf

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