

TAKING TIME FOR YOURSELF



There are always a handful of roles that each of us are juggling. If you are a parent, a student, an employee, a caretaker, someone struggling with a mental health concern, or are just feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of day-to-day life, the idea of taking time for yourself may seem unimaginable. Sometimes it can be difficult to even take basic care of ourselves - but there are small things that can be done to make self-care and taking time for ourselves a little bit easier.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF



Accept yourself as you are. Remember that you are running your own race. Try not to compare your life and what it looks like right now to anyone else's. When you start comparing yourself to others, it's easy to feel inadequate, which makes it hard to even take the very first step in self-care. Instead, try your best to accept the person that you are and where you are in life right now.



Focus on the basics. Sometimes being an adult is not easy and it can feel impossible to get even the littlest things done. Taking time for yourself doesn't necessarily mean treating yourself to special things. One of the most important things you can do is focus on steps to ensure you're living a healthy lifestyle. Showering and brushing your teeth every day, eating nutrient-rich food, moving your body, and getting good sleep are all building blocks of good self-care.



Find what makes you happy. If you're caught up in taking care of all of your responsibilities — rather than taking care of yourself — you may not even really know what kind of self-care you need. What works for someone else may not work for you. Take time to think about what things you can do to make yourself feel happy or accomplished and include them in building the self-care routine that makes the most sense for you, your schedule, and your health overall.



Practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is one of the best ways to make the most out of any amount of time that you do have to care for yourself. Take a few slow, deep breaths, focus on each of your senses, and try to be fully present in whatever you're doing. Not only does mindfulness reduce stress, it also has the power to help you slow down and really take care of yourself — even in the midst of all of life's challenges and responsibilities.



Make small goals. Unfortunately, taking time for yourself doesn't just happen overnight, so try to be patient. Instead of putting pressure on yourself to immediately have the perfect self-care routine established, set small goals that you want to accomplish for yourself. Focus on small, daily tasks like wanting to take a 15-minute walk outside each day, or journaling for 10 minutes every night — rather than a complete overhaul of your life, all at once.



Set some boundaries. Sometimes, the only way to really be able to make time for self-care is to lessen the amount of time or energy that you are giving away to other people. Having the sometimes tough conversations with people that set boundaries around your time, your emotions, your things, your other relationships, your health, and your opinions can give you an opportunity to devote more time and effort to yourself and your own mental health.



Remember that you are not alone. Everyone struggles to take time for themselves, so try not to get down on yourself for not having everything perfectly balanced all of the time. As circumstances change, you'll probably have to rethink your routines and how you use your time many times throughout your life. There will always be people that understand where you're coming from and are willing to help. Ask your friends and family for help when you need to take some time for your mental health. They may even be able to offer you some guidance on how they manage self-care and take time for their own well-being.

FAST FACTS



On average, people only spend 15 minutes a day on health-related self-care.¹



Self-care is proven to reduce stress and anxiety levels while increasing self-compassion.²



Of people who took a depression screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 73% felt tired or said that they had very little energy at least half of the time or nearly every day.³

TAKING A MENTAL HEALTH SCREEN IS ONE WAY TO WORK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

¹Yaribeygi, H., Panahi, Y., Sahraei, H., Johnston, T. P., & Sahebkar, A. (2017). The impact of stress on body function: A review. *EXCLI Journal*, 16, 1057–1072. <https://doi.org/10.17179/excli2017-480>

²Shapiro, S., Brown, K., & Biegel, G. (2007). Teaching Self-Care to Caregivers: Effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on the Mental Health of Therapists in Training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1(2), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1931-3918.1.2.105>

³Proprietary data. [MHAScreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). 2020.

PRIORITIZING SELF-CARE

When we have a lot on our plates or we are facing mental health challenges, it can feel easy to push our own needs to the side. However, making time for ourselves is essential to our overall well-being. Use this worksheet to help you better understand what is holding you back from taking time for yourself and your needs.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT WOULD MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER, BUT YOU CANNOT SEEM TO DO?

Write out some thoughts and expectations that are preventing you from doing the self-care that you need. Don't worry about whether these thoughts or expectations are true. Instead, write down anything that comes to mind.

THOUGHTS

Examples: I don't have time; my needs don't matter

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

EXPECTATIONS

Examples: I should be better at __; I would do __ if it helped me

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Pick one thought or expectation from either list above and re-write it here.

THOUGHT OR EXPECTATION

Focusing in on this specific thought or expectation, answer the following questions.

WHERE DOES THIS THOUGHT, OR EXPECTATION COME FROM? WHO SETS IT?

HOW DOES IT GET IN THE WAY OF TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF?

Now that you have answered the questions above, rewrite this thought so that it supports you and your self-care needs.

NEW THOUGHT OR EXPECTATION

Examples: If I do __ I may feel better; It is ok to take time for myself

While we only worked through one thought, we can use this process to evaluate how our negative thoughts and expectations prevent us from taking care of ourselves regularly. On a separate sheet of paper, follow these same steps with the other thoughts and expectations you listed in the first set of boxes.