

Self Care

Self care is personal health maintenance. It is an activity that prevents/treats disease or improves/restores overall health. There are many ways to engage in self care – think about what is enjoyable to you and makes you feel good physically and mentally.

Here are some tips for practicing self care:

Relax: During the day take “mini breaks” by engaging in brief activities that are calming and/or enjoyable. One example is taking a few minutes to breathe deeply. To do this, sit comfortably in a chair. Slowly take in a deep breath, hold it, and then exhale very slowly. Try to relax your shoulders and muscles as you do this.

Exercise: Physical activity is a great way to relieve stress and boost your immune system and mood. By increasing your physical activity you can reduce the negative effects of stress on your body. Try walking, swimming, yoga, hiking or dancing. If you are not used to engaging in regular physical exercise, start slowly – even a few minutes of exercise is a great start!

Practice good sleep hygiene: Sleep helps your body restore energy used during the day and is necessary to fight illness. Help yourself get enough sleep by maintaining a sleep schedule (i.e., going to bed and waking up at the same time each night and morning) and, when possible, make sure your bedroom is cool, dark and quiet.

Have healthy habits: Eat a balanced diet and drink enough water. Being hungry and/or dehydrated impacts your physical health and mood. Limit alcohol use and avoid tobacco and nonprescription drug use. Be aware that having a lot of caffeine and sugar may make you feel restless and “on edge.”

Practice acceptance: Many people get distressed over things they can’t control or have difficulty accepting. Learn to recognize and accept things that are out of your control. Ask yourself, “Is there a specific step I can take right now to address this issue?” If it is something you can control, try to take small steps to solve the issue in a calm manner. If not, remind yourself there is nothing to be done right now and focus on another task or pleasant activity.

Focus on the moment: When coping with illness and treatment, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by information, tasks and wondering about the future. One way to decrease worry is by focusing on each day, one at a time.

Be Gentle with yourself: There are many changes that come with illness and treatment and it is easy to be hard on ourselves about the things we “should have” done. Rather than beating yourself up over the past (i.e., “I should have ...”) think about what you can learn and plan for the future. Watch out for perfectionism—set realistic and attainable goals. Remind yourself that everyone makes errors and no one is perfect!

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- **Get organized:** A lot of things are out of your control when dealing with illness and treatment. One way to take back control is by planning how you want to spend your free time (i.e., time not at medical appointments, etc.) Develop a realistic schedule of daily activities that includes time for work, sleep, relationships, and recreation. Use a daily “to do list”. Improve your physical surroundings by cleaning your house. Avoid procrastination—rather try breaking tasks into smaller more manageable pieces and deciding what you want to do first. Remember, it’s impossible to do it all at once!
- **Quiet time:** Balance your family, social, and work demands with quiet alone time. Activities such as listening to relaxing music, taking a bubble bath, taking a quiet walk, writing down your thoughts and feelings in a journal, doing a hobby, or watching a favorite television program or movie are great ways to unwind.
- **Spend time with friends:** Talking to and spending time with friends is a great way to reduce stress. Regular social interaction is beneficial for both your physical and mental health.
- **Set aside small amounts of time:** You are juggling a lot of tasks and may often feel busy and tired. It can feel stressful to try to make time for self care. Remember, you don’t need to set aside long amounts of time. Spending just a few minutes each day on an activity you enjoy (e.g., reading, listening to music, going for a short walk) can add up and help you to feel more relaxed and energized over time.