

## What is Self Care?

So, you may hear this phrase 'practice self care' more often these days, especially after the pandemic, but what is self care? Do a quick experiment -open up your Instagram app and search 'self care'. You will be flooded with pictures of positive affirmations, words like 'self-regulation', lists of ways to deal with stress, ads for life-coaches, reminders to 'set boundaries', and all sorts of cute stylish little pictures with cats and hearts in them. So what does any of this have to do with self-care?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, self-care is simply 'taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical and mental health.' It further explains how practicing self-care can help with stress management, decrease risk of illness and increase energy – even small everyday things can make a big impact.

Do you ever ask yourself 'do I have a healthy relationship with myself?' Probably not, but you would likely want one. Often when people think of taking care of themselves or their health, they think of two things: lose weight and exercise more. While those might be two examples of how someone would take care of themselves, self-care is not nearly limited to just weight and exercise. Engaging in self-care involves doing the things that make you feel taken care of mentally, physically, and emotionally. When you are not practicing any self-care, and going through your day without attention to your needs, you may become stressed, anxious, depressed, burned out. Self-care is not 'self-ish' – it is a necessary to ensure you maintain your personal wellness.

So what makes you feel like you are prioritizing your well being? Here are some examples.

- Healthy eating: losing weight was one example above, but eating healthy and drinking water can also increase energy and focus
- Exercise: exercise is a quick and easy mood boost. Besides it being good for you physically, exercise increases dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine, which are the chemicals that modulate mood.
- Sleep: getting enough sleep is crucial to maintaining positive mental health. Create an evening routine by such things as taking a bath, using lavender spray on pillows, reading in bed. Avoid looking at your phone as the blue light can keep you up.
- Meditate: many people dismiss meditation because they don't they will be able to focus or clear their mind. However, you do not need to be an expert to meditate. You just need to be able to sit or lay down, close your eyes, and listen to the guide lead you. Resource – 'Insight Timer' app (free meditations).
- Journal: the power of journaling can be profound. Some use a notebook for an unstructured 'brain dump', and others use structured journals with questions and prompts. There is no right way to journal, except it's best to hand-write, not type on your phone or computer. You will gain more of a physiological release of stress by physically writing.
- Get a massage: no one will argue this one. Massages are great.
- Play with a pet: there is nothing like the unconditional love of a pet, and they always want you to play with them, walk them, scratch their bellies. Make a pet happy!
- Do something new/creative: let your mind go and create something. Whether it is planting flowers, creating art, developing a new hobby, get involved with something you have never done before.
- Practice deep breathing: deep breathing will help to slow your heart rate, and center your mind. Get comfortable, breathe in for 5 seconds through your nose while your belly fills up, hold for 5 seconds, and let the breath out through your mouth for 5 seconds. Repeat.
- Call/text a friend: Maybe you need some support, or just to laugh or chat.

- Read: some people like to read physical books, some like e-readers. Whatever you prefer, get immersed in a book. Reading before bed is also recommended.
- Take a cold shower: cold water and ice is being shown to lower anxiety. Take a 30 second cold shower before jumping into bed. Hold ice on your pressure points. Fill up a bowl of ice water and dip your face into it. For real.
- Practice gratitude: notice and reflect upon the things you're thankful for.
- There are SO many more ways to practice self-care! Just do something you like doing!

So, how does this all tie back to the Instagram posts you saw? Everyone has their own thoughts and feelings about what makes them emotionally and physically healthy. Whether is it reading affirmations, making a list of how to deal with stress, or looking at cute cat drawings, there is some type of self-care for everyone.

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