

Self-care

Objectives

This module will help you explore and understand:

- what self-care is and why it's important
- basic self-care strategies
- how to create a self-care plan.

What is self-care?

Self-care means being mindful of our own needs to improve our own physical, mental and emotional health. Self-care can take many different forms, ranging from making sure we get enough sleep to getting some fresh air for a few minutes. We'll explain some of the different types of self-care and how they can help you.

Why is self-care important?

Self-care is particularly important when working through the information on this website. This work can be difficult, especially when feeling other strong emotions like anxiety or fear about the future. Making sure we find time for self-care can help us deal with the challenges we face in a healthier way.

We also suggest doing this work in a way that feels emotionally and psychologically safe. This might mean involving a trusted family member, friend, or professional, so you don't feel isolated and have someone to discuss the information with.

Regularly using strategies like breathing techniques, grounding, mindfulness, and self-compassion can help us to cope with difficult emotions, thoughts, and situations.

Self-care is important in helping you move away from risky and illegal behaviour. When people feel happy and content, they are far less likely to offend or re-offend. People often tell us that when they offended, their relationships with themselves and other people are strained.

Focusing on self-care can help us to see ourselves in a more pleasant light and this can help to improve our relationships with others.

Wellbeing Assessment

Return to the website to complete the wellbeing assessment that will ask about your physical, social, mental, spiritual and emotional self-care.

Setting self-care goals

Some self-care strategies are straightforward and easy to use on a daily basis, and others need more practice and attention but are hugely worthwhile.

It might help you to complete a self-care plan. There isn't a one size fits all for this and will need to be tailored to meet your own needs. Think about what is going on in your life and which areas would benefit from attention and self-care – the scores that you gave for each of the sections above will help you.

Use the table below to set some goals to improve your self-care. You don't need to have goals in all sections, particularly if the section is already high-scoring.

Area of your life	Goal
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No internet an hour before bed ▪ Regular bedtime ▪ Walk ten minutes every day
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Call a friend once a week ▪ Join a club or do an activity to meet new people
Mental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make a list of five things you like about yourself ▪ Take a relaxing bath ▪ Say no to things you don't want to do – boundaries are important
Spiritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spend ten minutes meditating each day ▪ Listen to a guided relaxation before bed
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Talk about how you feel with a trusted person ▪ Keep a diary

Self-care strategies

There are many strategies that can be helpful when feeling anxious, stressed, discomfort, or emotional distress. Below are some examples and how to do them. Some strategies will be more effective than others for each person, and it is about finding out which works for you.

Breathing techniques

Regulating our breathing helps us to re-centre ourselves in the moment and to regain control of our bodies when we feel that we are overwhelmed. It can help to bring our heart rate back to a normal rate and reduce physiological signs and symptoms of anxiety. Breathing exercises can bring the most benefit when they are repeated often, such as daily.

Breathing technique 1: Slowing your breathing

We can do this exercise sitting or standing with both feet flat on the ground, roughly hip-width apart. If sitting, arms should be placed on the chair arms. The breath should flow as deep down into the belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.

- Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for 3 to 5 minutes.

Breathing technique 2: belly breathing

Belly breathing is easy to do and very relaxing. This basic exercise can be used at any time to relax or relieve stress.

- Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position.
- Put one hand on your belly just below your ribs and the other hand on your chest.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let your belly push your hand out. Your chest should not move.
- Breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. Feel the hand on your belly go in, and use it to push all the air out.
- Do this breathing 3 to 10 times. Take your time with each breath.
- Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

Breathing technique 3: roll breathing

[Roll breathing](#) helps to develop the full use of the lungs and to focus on the rhythm of breathing. This technique can be done in any position. However, whilst learning, it is best to lie on your back with your knees bent.

- Put your left hand on your belly and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.
- Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your "belly" (left) hand goes up when you inhale and your "chest" (right) hand remains still. Always breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Repeat 8 to 10 times.
- When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add this second step to your breathing: inhale first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. Breathe slowly and regularly. As you do so, your right hand will rise and your left hand will fall a little as your belly falls.
- As you exhale slowly through your mouth, make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right-hand fall. As you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
- Practice breathing in and out in this way for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your belly and chest rises and falls like the motion of rolling waves.
- Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

Grounding exercises

Grounding exercises are techniques to bring ourselves back to the present moment, balancing ourselves emotionally. These techniques can be particularly helpful when feeling worried and anxious about the past or what could happen in the future. They can help to redirect our thoughts away from traumatic memories, flashbacks, and distressing feelings and bring us back to the here and now. There are many different types of grounding techniques. They aren't always easy and it can take practice before they begin to work well for you, so don't give up if they don't seem to help immediately. It is important to use the techniques as early as you can when you begin to experience distress – although they are a useful technique to practice generally, whether feeling distressed or not.

Grounding exercise 1: 5-4-3-2-1 method

Acknowledge five things you can see around you; four things you can touch around you; three things you can hear around you; two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.

The aim of this technique is to focus on the world around you so that you are less focused on what is making you feel anxious, worried, or distressed.

Grounding exercise 2: categories

Choose one or two broad categories such as cities, dog breeds, or ice cream flavours, and list as many as you can within that category. Alternatively, try reciting the alphabet backwards or practicing times tables. Again, the purpose of these exercises is to focus your attention on something other than whatever is making you feel ungrounded.

Grounding exercise 3: body scanning

In a sitting or standing position, focus on each part of your body and how it feels. Try not to assign judgement to this process – for example, if you notice that your chest feels tight, do not begin to reflect on why that might be. Instead, identify how each body part feels and then move on to the next. Close your eyes if that helps you to focus on the exercise.

Begin by taking some deep breaths and then bring your awareness to where your body makes contact with the floor or chair. Begin by scanning your left foot for any sensations, moving up your calf and thigh. Then move to the right leg and follow the same order. It is ok if you don't feel anything, just observe that and move on. Then focus on your stomach, feeling it rise and fall with your breath. Next focus on your left hand and arm. Bring curiosity to your scanning, continuing to notice any sensations. Continue with your right hand and work up the arm. Move to your chest, scanning upwards to your neck, face, jaw, and throat. Pay attention to any sensations in your head, ears, and the back of your neck. Finally, think of your body as a whole, noticing how they all connect. Stay alert to any sensations that you experience and notice them without judgement.

It is likely that your mind will wander during this exercise. This is expected. Simply remind yourself to refocus and return to concentrating on the breath and the body scan.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be a fantastic way of making sure that we are aware of where we are, what we're doing, and how to be present in the moment. It can be useful in situations where we feel overwhelmed and disoriented by things like work or personal lives, but also when we need to give ourselves some self-care to maintain our emotional wellbeing. Some people find it helpful for mindfulness exercises to be built into their everyday routine, even if only for a few minutes.

How to practice mindfulness

- Use a mindfulness app or video – search online for “mindfulness” or “guided meditation”. E.g., [‘Headspace app’](#).
- Breathing exercises focus your attention on your breathing, its rhythm, and how each inhale and exhale of breath feels and makes your body respond.
- Meditation, sitting quietly and away from distractions, focusing on your thoughts, sensations you are experiencing, the sounds around you, and your environment. If your mind starts to move on to other things, bring it back to the task at hand.

Using self-care strategies

Having thought about, and hopefully practiced, some of the self-care techniques, think about what you can add to your self-care plan. Using the original template, consider what other techniques and resources will be helpful for you, and add these to the bottom two rows of your plan.

Area of your life	Goal
Physical	
Social	
Mental	
Spiritual	
Emotional	

Self-care techniques that work for me	
Useful resources	

The importance of sleep

Most people say that good quality sleep is important to their general sense of well-being.

Many people who have problems related to fantasies about children, sexual preoccupation and problematic pornography use say that these difficulties can be especially tough at night, often disrupting their sleep.

Problematic sexual fantasies may be more readily triggered in the bedroom, last thing at night, if this has become your routine.

Tips to help you sleep

Following routines and practices can help good quality sleep. This is sometimes called '[sleep hygiene](#)'.

Here are some things to try:

- Stick to a regular pattern by aiming to wake up and go to bed at the same times every day of the week. Some people choose to stay up and wake much later during the weekends, which tends to disrupt the sleep pattern into the following week.
- Avoid daytime napping. If you do nap, it is best to avoid napping for longer than 30 minutes.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine and food consumption too close to bedtime. Tea, coffee, colas drinks and chocolate with caffeine can disrupt sleep if consumed in the evening.
- Regular exercise can help you sleep well.
- Daily exposure to natural light helps to maintain a healthy sleep-wake cycle.
- Use your bed for sleep, rather than as a place to read, watch TV, listen to the radio, or use your phone, laptop or tablet. That way, the bed becomes associated with sleep rather than with these other activities.
- Think about whether your bedroom might be making it harder for you to sleep, for example, temperature, uncomfortable bed, inadequate curtains or blinds.
- Try to avoid mentally engaging in activities close to bedtime. It can take some time for the mind to switch off and if you are feeling alert you are less likely to fall asleep.

It might take some time before any changes you make to your sleep routines take effect. If you regularly find you are having problems with your sleep-wake cycles or are feeling sleepy during the daytime, you should take advice from your GP.

*Please return to the **Reflection** tab to the module to reflect on your progress after completing it.*