Soaring to Self-Care Workbook



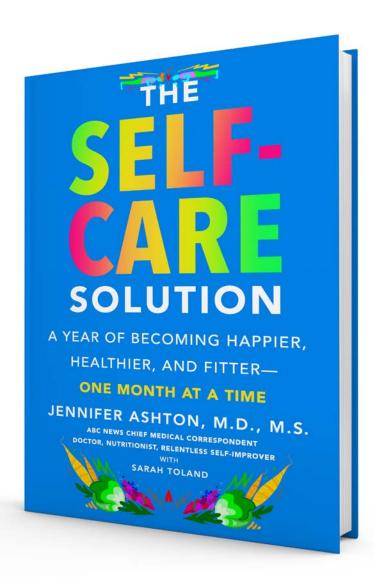
Jennifer Ashton, MD

A Companion Guide to 'The Self-Care Solution: A Year of Becoming Happier, Healthier, and Fitter — One Month at a Time' by Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News Chief Medical Correspondent

FROM THE EDITORS OF



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At Everyday Health we believe that self-care is about prioritizing wellness within the existing framework of your life.

To be clear, we're not talking facial masks and long, hot baths (though we love these, too). Rather, self-care is your commitment to inspired and enabled wellness. When you soar to self-care, you enrich your life with ongoing education and resources that help you live a healthier, more informed, and inspired life. You know that good nutrition, quality sleep, and supportive relationships matter. Getting the right doctor, diagnosis, and medication matter. Your physical and emotional health and well-being matter.

ABC News Chief Medical Correspondent Jennifer Ashton, MD, shares these values. In her new book, *The Self-Care Solution*, she lays out her personal one-year journey to self-care, offering up a fun new challenge each month. This guide is designed as the companion workbook to her book, which aims to help you find the few minutes a day it takes to focus on yourself.

There's no exact formula for achieving wellness. In fact, you can start this program any time of the year, and switch the order of the tasks as you see fit. The ultimate goal: to emerge more knowledgeable about yourself — and to create your own self-care toolkit that leaves you feeling and looking good inside and out.

Cheers to a happier and healthier you.

THE EDITORS OF EVERYDAY HEALTH

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JANUARY: Give Up Alcohol



After the party-packed holidays, start the year with a reset. "Dry January" involves giving up alcohol for one month, which can profoundly change your relationship with booze for the better. You may enter February with a whole new outlook on the role alcohol plays in your life.

Surprising Benefits of a Dry January

MORE MINDFUL EATING HABITS

Alcohol lowers your inhibitions, making it easier to consume more food without realizing it. Skipping alcohol at dinner can make you more attuned to the pleasurable tastes and textures of food, so you're satisfied on less. Often, this helps with weight loss.

BETTER SKIN HEALTH

Alcohol is dehydrating. Better hydration is good for your body and skin. That can translate into a plumper, more radiant complexion.

REDUCED RISK OF CHRONIC DISEASE

You're likely drinking more than you realize. A glass of wine or mixed drink at a restaurant is often far bigger than you think. Drinking more than one standard drink a day for women and two for men can increase the risk of breast cancer, obesity, and high blood pressure, and lead to poor sleep.

I had made up my mind. I was going to do a dry month. On New Year's Eve, I enjoyed a celebratory lunch with rosé and dinner with tequila, feeling no apprehension for the month ahead. I had to draw a line in the sands somewhere, and this was it.



— Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News chief medical correspondent and author of The Self-Care Solution



Make a list of the ways that you'll make giving up alcohol easier:

Make yourself a mocktail after work, like a flavored sparkling water or kombucha.
☐ Change your routine so you won't be tempted to pour a drink.

FEBRUARY: Build Strength With Pushups and Planks



Pushups and planks are two body weight exercises that can be done anywhere, including at home, in the office, or in a hotel room. They're also among the most effective for improving upper body and core strength, and bettering posture.

90 Seconds Is All You Need

If you've made a resolution to exercise in the past, you may have told yourself you'd go to the gym for a half hour or hour most days of the week. But you don't need that kind of commitment to see results. This exercise will take just 90 seconds every day. That's something to keep in mind, especially when you're running low on motivation.



HOW TO DO A PLANK Hold a pushup position. Arms can be straight or you can rest your forearms on the ground (called a forearm plank). Engage your core throughout so that your back, butt, and thighs stay in a straight line. Avoid going into a Downward Dog position by keeping your butt down.



HOW TO DO A PUSHUP Get into a pushup position, hands under your shoulders. Lower down toward the ground, bending elbows. Keep your core engaged; don't sag or lift your butt. Press upwards until you reach the start position.

Schedule these exercises as you would a doctor's appointment or dinner with friends. Turn to your paper or virtual calendar, and write down exactly when you plan to perform them: as soon as you wake up? After you brush your teeth at night?

Modify the Move

Pushups and planks are simple exercises but not necessarily beginner ones. If you cannot yet successfully execute one or both, here's how to modify the move to suit your abilities:

MODIFIED PUSHUP Do a standing pushup with hands against a wall. When you're ready to make it harder, do the pushup holding onto a counter. Finally, move to the floor and perform a pushup from your knees.

MODIFIED PLANK You can perform these from your knees as well. If a standard plank is causing lower back pain, try a side plank where you balance on one forearm and the outer edge of your foot on the floor. Then switch sides.



Track Your Gains

Even if you can barely do one pushup on your knees now, you'll be astounded at the progress you'll make as each day goes by.

Start with a baseline:						
can do pushups on (date)						
I can hold a plank for seconds on (date)						
Time for a mid-month check-in:						
I can do pushups on (date)						
I can hold a plank for seconds on (date)						
At the end of the month, celebrate how far you've come:						
I can do pushups on (date)						
I can hold a plank for seconds on (date)						

MARCH AND APRIL: Start to Meditate and Break a Sweat



Springtime is for new beginnings. March is all about flexing your mental muscle with meditation, while April is focused on the physical in building up cardiovascular health. Both share some very similar benefits. In fact, runners often call logging miles their "meditation."

REMEMBER YOUR WHY. Both meditation and cardio exercise have been shown to improve sleep, decrease stress, and regulate mood, in some studies as effectively as antidepressants.

MEDITATION AND CARDIO CHANGE YOUR BRAIN. You've heard of a runner's high — and the same can be said about meditation. Research shows it can rewire your brain by stimulating the part that processes positive emotions while dampening the activity that responds to negative ones. Both meditation and exercise are cognitive enhancers that can hone your focus for daily tasks ahead.

BOTH ARE GOOD FOR YOUR HEART. Breaking a sweat strengthens your cardiorespiratory system — essential for reducing blood pressure and bettering cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Likewise, meditation treats your ticker by helping lower blood pressure and reducing heart attack and stroke risk.

I decided to make it my mission to meditate for 20 minutes every single day, seven days a week, for an entire month. To be successful, I knew I had to practice this first thing in the morning, before my day started and I got too busy, not waiting until I got home from work, when I knew I'd be too tired. I also preferred morning meditation — it helped immediately establish the right mental energy and mood I wanted for the rest of the day.

 Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News chief medical correspondent and author of *The Self-Care Solution*



Write It Down

What are three to five resources that will make starting a meditation routine easier? For example:

- Download an app like Headspace, Buddhify, Calm, or Insight Timer.
- Turn off the ringer and alerts on your phone while you're "in session."
- Set your alarm earlier and do it first thing.

What are three to five resources that will make starting a cardio routine easier? For example:

- Block out 30 minutes in your schedule and treat it like a meeting.
- Brainstorm activities you love (group class, cycling, running, dancing).
- If you're feeling unmotivated, promise yourself you'll walk for only five minutes.

MAY AND JUNE:

Eat a More Plant-Based Diet and Drink More Water



These two goals challenge you to make up for two things likely to be missing from your diet: more plants and water. An estimated 90 percent of Americans don't eat enough produce, and some reports suggest three-quarters of Americans are chronically dehydrated.

Why Plant-Based Is a Wise Way to Eat

Shifting your eating habits to include more plants (fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains) and fewer animal products (particularly red and processed meats) can pay off in spades:

BETTER BLOOD SUGAR Plant-based eaters enjoy improved beta cell function (cells that help produce insulin, a hormone that ferries glucose to cells) and insulin sensitivity (a quality that helps those cells receive the glucose). This effect can help lower your risk of type 2 diabetes.

REDUCED WEIGHT Research shows that people who incorporate fiber-rich, low-calorie beans and lentils into their diet weigh less on average than those who leave legumes off their plate.

CANCER PROTECTION Red and processed meats are linked to a variety of cancers, including breast and colon. The American Institute for Cancer Research recommends prioritizing plants to help decrease risk of disease.

Are You Hydrated Enough?

Take the pee test. Your urine should be a pale yellow (before it hits the bowl) — not dark or, conversely, totally clear.

When I began taking stock of how to improve my health this year, drinking more water was an easy choice for a challenge. I knew it was a daily oversight that was impacting my health and happiness, and from my current continual state of mild dehydration, I had nowhere to go but up.

— Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News chief medical correspondent and author of The Self-Care Solution



What's Your Goal?

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

At least 1 ½ cups of fruits and 3 cups of vegetables daily

WATER INTAKE

The Institute of Medicine recommends **women consume 2.7 liters (91 ounces)** and **men consume 3.7 liters (125 ounces)** of fluid daily. Twenty percent of that can come from the foods you eat (like fruits and vegetables, or even oatmeal).

MAY AND JUNE:

Eat a More Plant-Based Diet and Drink More Water continued



Think of two new opportunities to sneak an extra serving of fruits or veggies into your meals each day. If you keep it up daily, you'll have eaten an additional 122 servings of produce by the end of June!

SOME INSPIRATION: Use half the meat in a recipe and twice as many veggies, trade your chicken order for tofu when getting takeout, or throw a few kale leaves into your morning fruit smoothie.

1			
2			
5			

There are many ways you can consume water. Which one is right for you? (Experiment and mark your favorites.)

☐ Filled with ice
Cold from the fridge
☐ Room temperature
Filtered
Пар
☐ Flat
Sparkling (flavored or plain, as long of added sugar)
With pieces of fruit (berries, lemon, oranges), herbs (rosemary, thyme, or cucumbers



JULY AND AUGUST:

Increase Your Step Count and Make Tech Time Count



As physical activity has decreased, our obsession with electronic devices has increased. This summer, aim to take back your fitness, weight, mood, and focus. July brings nice weather that's perfect for an outdoor sweat session, while August is a natural extension of that, challenging you to put down your phone and just be.

Don't Be Surprised if Walking Transforms Your Life (Really)

- ✓ Increasing your daily step count by 10,000 can burn enough calories to help you lose one pound per week.
- ✓ Walking for 15 minutes may decrease cravings for sugary foods.
- ✓ Compared with sedentary folks, those who walk at least seven hours per week have a 14 percent lower risk for breast cancer.
- ✓ A 10-minute walk could boost your mood as effectively as a
 45-minute workout.
- ✓ Walking an hour each day improves bone mineral density.

…I knew my phone was interfering with my personal relationships and preventing me from enjoying the moment, noticing my surroundings, and fully appreciating my food, family, and friends.

 Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News chief medical correspondent and author of *The Self-Care Solution*

Trade One Habit for Another

When you're not looking at a screen, vow to look up and pay attention to your surroundings:

- Is the sky a particularly bold shade of blue today?
- Are your kids doing something really funny as they play together outside?
- Can you discuss your day with your partner (instead of ignoring them at the dinner table)?
- Can you take a deep breath and focus on something you're grateful for?







Write It Down

Step Up to Your Health

Think of three chances to up your step count. Maybe it's taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking farther away from the entrance of the grocery store, or asking your boss if they want to trade the conference room for the sidewalk for your next meeting.

You Don't Have to Completely Unplug

Think about your day. Brainstorm three times when emails and social media can wait, and you can put your phone away or use the "Do Not Disturb" function. You'll probably find you have more space for a tech detox than you think.

SEPTEMBER: Reduce Sugar Intake



This month is the ideal time to rein in your inner sugar monster before Halloween and the holidays take hold. But beware of sugar lurking in expected fare, like bread and sauces, and aim to stick with the World Health Organization's daily recommended limit of 25 grams (g) of sugar for women or 35 g of sugar for men.

What Counts?

There are natural sugars found in fruits, starchy vegetables (peas, corn), and dairy products. Those aren't the sugars you need to avoid. After all, they're packed with essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Your goal this month is to reduce your intake of simple and added sugars (now on nutrition labels), which have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and fatty liver disease. For how to find it, see the "Sleuth It Out" box.

Do the Math

Nutrition labels list grams of sugar, which can be tough to visualize. It may be more helpful for you to have the equation to convert grams to teaspoons.



Sleuth It Out

Sugar is abundant in soda and candy, but it also hides in surprising places. In fact, there are more than 60 names for sugar. Read the ingredient label on your favorite foods. If they contain any of the below, you're consuming added sugar.





Where Did You Find It?

MOST OFTEN. (Coffee drinks, nut butter, oatmeal, bottled dressings and sauces, and cereal are examples.) Next, scan the nutrition label. Below, write down the name of the food and grams of sugar it contains. Can you find a similar product that contains less sugar?

FOOD OR DRINK	GRAMS OF SUGAR	SUBSTITUTE

OCTOBER: Make Daily Stretching a Priority



Active muscles benefit from a boost in flexibility, and stretching can similarly revive muscles rendered inactive from sitting all day. If you're a stretching newbie, you may be surprised to find you're less stressed and anxious, sleeping better, more pain free, and have sharper focus by month's end.

Types of Stretching

ALL THREE CAN HAVE A PLACE IN YOUR TENSION-RELIEVING ROUTINE:

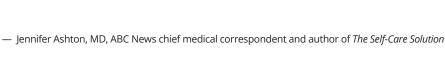
- **Static stretching** is when you hold a position for a fixed amount of time, say 15 to 60 seconds or more. Touching your toes is a classic example of a static stretch. These are best done after your body has already warmed up. For many people, the perfect time for static stretching is after a workout.
- **Dynamic stretching** is when you move your joints through their full range of motion. Leg swings, arm circles, and high knees are examples. These are often performed as part of an exercise warmup.
- **Foam rolling** uses a lightweight cylinder for self-myofascial release to work out knots in muscles and tendons. You can purchase these for less than \$20 apiece on Amazon. One way to use a foam roller is to lie down, position the roller perpendicular to your spine, and roll it up and down to massage your spine.



Dr. Ashton's three-minute full-body daily stretching routine:

- Head circles
- Ear to shoulder on each side
- Chin to chest
- Tilt head back
- Arm circles
- Bear hug
- ✓ Bend forward and back (to stretch your back)
- ✓ Twist right and left

- ✓ Bend forward and touch the floor
- √ Pigeon pose (one on each side)
- Straddle stretch on the floor and lean forward
- ✓ Ankle circles





NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER: Sleep and Laugh More



To finish the year strong, focus on two factors of health that seem optional — but are nonnegotiables. First is sleep. One in three among us is chronically sleep deprived. Adults should aim for seven to nine hours per night to reduce the risk of disease, regulate appetite, and improve mood and cognition. Next, you'll end on a high note by making space to find joy, have fun, and light up with laughter.

Prep Your Bedroom for Better Z's

Your environment sets the stage for sound slumber. Make sure you're taking these steps to set yourself up for sleep success:

- To muffle sounds, turn on a fan or white-noise machine, or wear ear plugs.
- Turn down your thermostat to between 60 and 67 degrees F, as a cool room facilitates sleep.
- Block out light with curtains or an eye mask, and use night lights for bathroom trips.
- Choose a mattress and pillows that you find comfortable.
- If you suspect your bed partner has a sleep problem (they snore, for example), ask that they get evaluated at the doctor. In the meantime, ask them to wear a nasal strip or avoid sleeping on their back to reduce sniffing and snorting.
- Keep electronics, including computers and TVs, out of the bedroom.

Light Up Your Life

Unlike sleep, there's no specific amount of time you have to giggle on a daily basis.

But doing it regularly — and most importantly, laughing even during stressful seasons of life — is a science-backed antidote to worry, anxiety, and a bad mood. If you can't get out a good laugh, try a wide-toothed smile. Flashing a grin not only lifts your spirits but makes others around you happy, too.

For the month of December, I decided to make it my mission to laugh more and rediscover that innate childlike glee we're all born with.

 Jennifer Ashton, MD, ABC News chief medical corresponden and author of *The Self-Care Solution*



Write It Down

Build a Better Bedtime Routine

Just like when you were a kid, wind-down time is crucial in helping you drift off faster — and stay asleep throughout the night. Brainstorm relaxing, technology-free things you can do in the evening, beginning a half hour before tucking in. Here are a few to get you started:

- Take a warm shower
- Read a book
- Do some light stretching

Find Time for Joy

What tickles your funny bone? It's different for everyone, and there's no right answer. Here are some ideas to help inspire:

- Watch reruns of your favorite funny show
- Nab tickets to a comedy show
- Read a book by an author you find hilarious

