

# Self Care Techniques

Taking care of yourself is a skill that can, and should, be learned and practiced. This guide will outline six methods of self care that can be used by anyone. Small acts of self-kindness have big impacts on our mood and daily outlook. Employing these three methods of self-care can have a large impact on general outcome and wellness.

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## TIPS ON FORMING POSITIVE SELF-TALK:

Phrase the positive statement in the present tense, even if you don't believe it yet.

Avoid absolutes such as "always", "never", "every", "none".

Allow yourself to make mistakes.

Allow yourself to reach goals with small steps.

Have someone you trust point out when you are using negative statements. Immediately replace them with positive statements.

## Positive Self-Talk

How we talk to ourselves has a proven physical effect. Negative self-talk (i.e. "I'm stupid") is interpreted by our bodies as stress and stimulates the release of the stress-hormone cortisol. Short term effects of cortisol can lead to physical changes like a fast heartbeat, sweating, and shallow breathing. These changes often stop us from being able to do whatever it is that triggered these negative thoughts. In the long term, stress can lower the immune system, increase risk of heart disease, result in weight gain, and have a detrimental effect on your wellbeing and ability to deal with new or difficult things.

Positive self-talk is a way to encourage yourself and combat the negative thoughts that tend to arise. Practicing positive self talk can look like changing "I'm so bad at this" (negative) to "If I try hard, I can do this well" (positive). Studies have shown that positive self talk has significant effects on how well you live. In the long term, the lowered stress levels achieved with positive self-talk can allow you to breathe deeper, strengthen your immune system so you get sick less easily, and lower the risk of heart disease.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Mental stress manifests as tense, tight muscles in the body. The results can be achy pain in areas including the neck, lower back, and head (headache). Progressive muscle relaxation is a method to mindfully relieve the tension in your body. The connection between mental stress and physical tension runs both ways- relaxing the body can help to relieve acute mental stress.

Find somewhere to lie on your back comfortably and sync your breath with purposeful tensing and relaxing of your muscles. Be sure to breathe in deeply while tensing a focused muscle group,

hold for about 5 seconds, then suddenly release your breath and muscle tension. Go through each muscle group in order, in a list or alongside a recorded audio guide. Audio can be found on youtube or any platform you find podcasts. Relax the whole body for a few seconds between each muscle group and pay attention to how your body feels throughout the exercise.

## Sleep Hygiene

Sleep is an essential physiologic process that allows our bodies and minds to heal, grow, and process the events of the day. Research has shown that lack of uninterrupted REM sleep is connected to depression, stress, impaired attention, and headaches. Employing healthy sleep hygiene is the first step to amending poor sleep.

First, set a sleep routine. Go to sleep at the same time every night and avoid daytime naps. Establishing routine behavior before bed is also beneficial, such as brushing your teeth, changing into pajamas, and/or 10 minute meditation before bed every night. Avoid screen time (phones, computers, television) for at least one hour before going to sleep. This will train your body to “wind down” before going to bed. In addition, only use the bed for sleep and sex. As much as possible, avoid other activities in the bed including reading, watching tv, or using your phone. Similarly, if you find yourself unable to fall asleep while in bed for more than an hour, get out of bed and do an unenjoyable (boring) task. This will help tire you out and will prevent tossing and turning. Contrary to popular belief, it is best to avoid exercise or heavy physical work right before bed. Physical work releases endorphins and stimulates your mind, making it more difficult to fall asleep right after. Employing these habits is the first step to improving sleep patterns.

## Meditation

Meditation is a practice aimed at relaxing the mind and body. It may be intimidating or difficult to start, but there are many resources for guided meditation that can make getting started easy. There are two main categories of meditation. The concentrative type of meditation will have you focus your attention on an unchanging stimulus, such as your breathing. The non-concentrative type of meditation will prompt you to observe your own mental activity and thoughts in a non-judgmental way. Research has shown that 20 minutes of daily meditation is associated with lower perceived stress, decreased chronic pain, improved blood pressure control, and improved self image. Meditation has also been linked with improved sleep patterns and lower levels of fatigue, anxiety, and depression.

### ORDER OF PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION\*:

1. Hands
2. Forearms
3. Upper Arms
4. Shoulders
5. Forehead
6. Facial Muscles (around eyes, nose, and mouth)
7. Jaw
8. Neck (extend back, then flex forward)
9. Back
10. Abdomen
11. Hips and Buttocks
12. Thighs
13. Lower Legs

\*full explanation of each muscle group found online at Michigan Medicine (2)

## RESOURCES FOR GUIDED MEDITATION:

Guided meditation will talk you through your practice. It can prompt certain images or thoughts. It may also help you keep time and track of your meditation.

### YOUTUBE CHANNELS

- Calm
- Beautiful Yoga
- Goodful

### PHONE APPS\*

- Headspace (free with in-app purchases)
- Aura (free daily 3 minute meditations)
- Mylife Meditation (free with in-app purchases)
- DownDog (free trials)

\*Hope Recovery is not associated with any apps. Hope Recovery is not affiliated with any statements and opinions of application companies or the application store.

To begin meditation, find a comfortable seat on the ground or on a cushion. Some people may find sitting still for long periods of time difficult. If this is the case, you can practice meditation while on a walk, performing routine behaviors, or doing yoga. You can start with meditation for 3-5 minutes and work your way up to 20 minute meditation sessions. There are three ways to go about your meditation practice, each with unique benefits.

First, you can try a ‘controlled focus’ type of meditation. In a controlled focus meditation, you focus on your breathing, a calming image, or a mantra. When thoughts crop up, notice them and let them go, bringing your focus back to your breath. This type of meditation has been shown to improve concentration and focus.

The second type of meditation is ‘no focus’. In this meditation, you notice the flow of your thoughts and minimize reactions. Zen meditation and binaural beats are types of no focus meditation. This type of meditation has been associated with reduced cortisol levels, decreased anxiety, and improved blood pressure control.

Finally, the third type is ‘mindfulness’ meditation. In mindfulness meditation, you are aware of yourself, your thoughts, and the world around you with minimal judgement. Mindfulness meditation is best for those who need to move around during their practice.

## Yoga

Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years all around the world. In recent years, western medicine has begun to accept yoga as a wellness technique that has great effects on the mind and body. All types of yoga share three common components: posture, regulated breathing, and mindfulness. Posture refers to the sequence of yoga poses that allow for simple stretching of the body. Yoga practices will often regulate deep breathing at around 6 breaths per minute with purposeful movement of the respiratory muscles. Finally, all yoga practices require you to be mindful of your body, your movement, and your breathing. Regular yoga practice has been linked to improved body posture and decreased joint and back pain. Furthermore, yoga practice has been associated with decreased depression, increased immune functioning (including virus specific immune responses), and moderate improvements in cognitive function.

As there are many types of yoga, it is important that you find the right kind for you. Yoga can be more meditative, where you hold fewer poses for longer periods of time, or more physically invigorating, with fluid movements between poses. Yoga practices may also target certain body

## RESOURCES FOR YOGA PRACTICES:

Yoga can be done following an instructor in a class. You can also do yoga at home using the guided yoga videos available online and in apps. Below are just some of the many yoga resources available.

### YOUTUBE CHANNELS

- Yoga with Adrienne
- Body Positive Yoga
- Yoga by Candace

### PHONE APPS\*

- DownDog (free trials)
- Daily Yoga (free with in-app purchases)
- Yoga Studio (free with in-app purchases)

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regions to address specific aches and pains you may be experiencing. One great thing about yoga is that it does not require equipment. You can practice on a yoga mat or simply barefoot on the floor. While 20-30 minutes of yoga daily is recommended, you can start with shorter practices and extend them as you become more comfortable.

## Make Art

You do not have to be particularly “creative” or “artistic” to benefit from making art. The field of art therapy was born from the understanding that engaging in art has significant beneficial effects on mental health. In fact, research has shown that making visual art (drawing, painting, sculpting) can reduce levels of the stress-hormone cortisol in the body. In addition, making art has been connected to increasing mindfulness, a practice known to improve mental health. Visual art exercises a different part of the brain than logical thinking, critical analyses, and language. This allows us to relax those parts of the brain while stimulating the parts that may not get used as often in day to day life.

Sometimes making art can be intimidating, especially for those who do not do it often. There are steps you can take to relieve some of that fear. First, allow yourself to make mistakes. The purpose of making the art is not to create a masterpiece, but rather to relieve stress and be mindful. Secondly, work with reusable materials to decrease the urge to make something ‘perfect’ every time. This can include dry erase markers on whiteboards/windows or playdough, for example. Finally, limit the amount of language you use when making your art. Try not to talk too much or listen to music with words. This allows the overworked parts of your brain to fully relax.

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