

A Psychologist's Tips for Self-Care

Self-care is the critical maintenance we need to be able to keep functioning. Sometimes self-care is compared to the way we care for our cars. Often, self-care is talked about as the equivalent to getting your car detailed or putting on a special coat of wax to keep the color shiny. But actually, self-care is much more closely comparable to putting gas in your car. If you don't stop for gas every so often, your car will stop functioning – no matter how much you want to keep driving down the road! It's the same for self-care. Without self-care, your brain, body and emotions will simply shut you down and make continued functioning impossible.

Examples of Self Care

Self-care takes many different forms! There are the essentials like eating, drinking water, bathing and sleeping. As silly as that sounds, simply stop for a moment and think about how often this week you skipped a meal or prioritized something else over getting a good night's sleep.

There are also a wide range of other forms of self-care that are tied directly to a person's specific preferences! Extroverts practice self-care by engaging in enjoyable social interactions while introverts may curl up on their own with a great book or an exciting new TV show. High-energy folks tend to prefer self-care like exercise or exhilarating hobbies, while others may want peaceful or calming activities to recharge or find joy.

The most rewarding forms of self-care are also determined by whatever challenges exist in a person's life. Right now, during the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders, many people are feeling isolated, so they are using technology to connect and practicing self-care by reaching out to loved ones in new ways. Others are experiencing cabin fever and so they take a break from their daily responsibilities to walk around their neighborhood.

Self-care for parents

Parents are being asked to take on more during these times than ever before. With schools and many offices closed, many parents are juggling working from home, monitoring their child's distance learning, [organizing activities](#) to keep kids entertained and engaged, and more. That is why it's important for parents and caregivers to practice self-care.

I think the best metaphor for this is the use of oxygen masks on planes. Taking care of yourself makes it possible for you to care for others. If you fall apart, everyone who relies on you will also be feeling lost or unraveled! Caregivers are often so selfless; I find it's helpful to point out that taking care of ourselves is just one more way we take care of others.

Proper self-care improves productivity, improves mood, improves attention and concentration, increases patience, and increases the rewarding experiences that you can have when serving in a caregiving role!



What happens when we ignore self-care

Think of practicing self-care like a bank account. There are baseline transactions that must occur every day, like eating and sleeping. Beyond that, the need for self-care varies with daily stresses. The number of stressors in a day are like withdrawals and thus determine the balancing requirements for self-care, which are like deposits.

Ironically, the more stressed we are, the less we tend to prioritize self-care, which can lead to very serious things like burnout or “breakdowns.”

Burnout is probably the biggest outcome of neglecting self-care. Other things include increased chances of getting sick, increased unpleasant emotions, decreased hope and/or productivity, or a feeling of helplessness.

Wanting to give up, feeling apathetic or disengaged, an increase in irritability, a decrease in patience, frequent judgment thoughts towards your kids, and resentment are all signs more self-care is needed STAT!

If you feel “too busy” for self-care

Stopping for self-care makes you better at your job. When you have the patience to stop and take a breath before snapping, or the concentration to remember every last little detail, you are on your A-game. So basically, if you want to be performing at your absolute best, self-care is one requirement to get there -- and stay there!

Self-care doesn't have to cost money or take much time. Pausing for one minute just to take five slow breaths can make a massive difference in your day! Or, when you get in your car, before starting the ignition, take a moment to pick your favorite music or flip through a photo album on your phone of treasured memories is another tiny thing to do for yourself.

How a psychologist practices self-care

I can also be guilty of saying, “I'm too busy for this” so one thing I've learned to do is to simply stop and do nothing for one minute. No thinking, no planning, no texting, no calling, no reading emails. Just sit there and either look out the window or take some breaths or think about what it feels like to sit on the beach.

I also love the outdoors, so for self-care I spend time hiking to take a break from human interaction since I get so much of it daily. Before the stay at home orders were in place, sometimes I would go by my siblings' homes and borrow my nephews to get to have some silly, bouncy, fun time if that's the mood I need! On particularly packed days, my self-care is as simple as making sure I eat lunch and take bathroom breaks, even if it means I am running a few minutes late.

<https://blog.chocchildrens.org/a-psychologists-tips-for-self-care/>

