



Self-Care

for the Mind - Body

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Self-care is a **core component** of maintaining emotional and physical well-being. Many people rely on just **one or two coping strategies** to navigate stress, anxiety, or emotional dysregulation.

While helpful, these go-to resources aren't always sufficient or effective in every situation.

Diversifying self-care strategies helps you stay balanced, resilient, and adaptable by meeting different emotional, physical, and psychological needs in complementary ways. When you rely on only one or two strategies, they can lose effectiveness or simply not fit every situation.

A diversified toolkit ensures you have options for stress relief, energy restoration, emotional regulation, connection, growth, and pleasure. It also prevents self-care from feeling routine or burdensome, keeping it flexible, sustainable, and responsive to changing life demands.

This guide is an **invitation to explore** a broader range of self-care tools, ones you may not have previously considered.

Approach

Self-care isn't about perfection. It's about knowing what works for you and using the right tool for the right situation.

- Stay curious and open to new strategies
- Expand your emotional toolbox
- Develop flexible responses to stress and anxiety
- Strengthen your **parasympathetic nervous system** (your calming system)
- Learn to regulate through trial, error, and awareness

A layered approach to self-care recognizes that well-being is multi-dimensional, and that relying on a single type of self-care is often insufficient. Instead, it involves cultivating multiple layers of tools across different domains:

- Spiritual tools support meaning, purpose, and connection to something larger than oneself, such as meditation, reflection, or practices aligned with personal values.
- Cognitive tools strengthen mental flexibility, perspective, and problem-solving skills, such as journaling, learning, mindfulness, or challenging unhelpful thought patterns.
- Emotional tools help regulate feelings and foster resilience, including emotional expression, validation, therapy, or connection with supportive people.

- Somatic tools address the body and physical state, supporting energy, relaxation, and overall health through movement, exercise, sleep, breathing exercises, or nutrition.

By intentionally layering these tools, you create a comprehensive self-care system where one layer can support another.

For example, physical exercise (somatic) can improve mood (emotional), which enhances clarity of thought (cognitive) and opens space for reflection or gratitude (spiritual).

This approach builds resilience and adaptability, allowing you to respond effectively to different life challenges.



Awareness

Understanding **load management** and **allostatic load** is crucial for effective self-care because it frames why the body and mind respond to stress the way they do and highlights the limits of resilience.

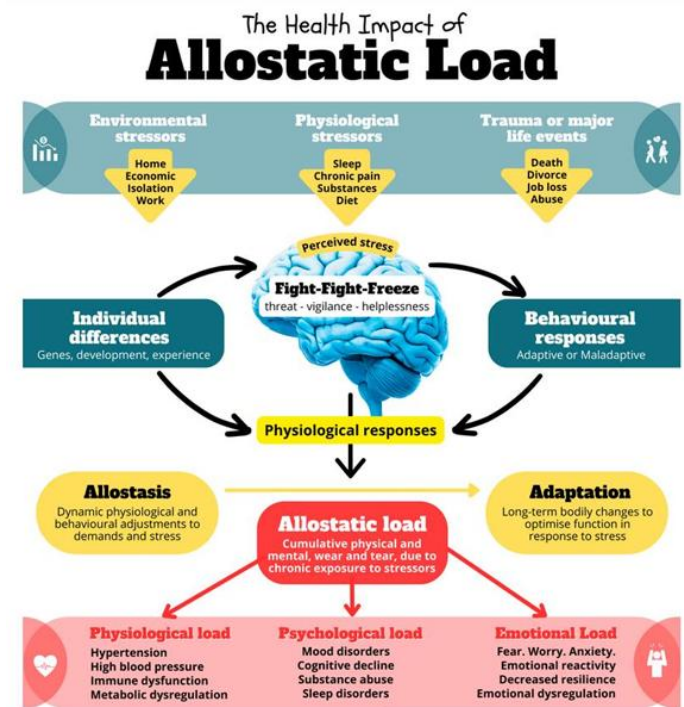
Attunement with our sensory system supports self-care by helping us notice early, subtle signals of stress, imbalance, or overwhelm so we can respond before those needs intensify. When we tune into sensations tension, warmth, breath, agitation, or ease we gain real-time information about our body's state, allowing us to choose regulating practices that restore balance. In this way, sensory awareness becomes a built-in guide that directs us toward timely, compassionate self-support.

- **Load management** is about recognizing the cumulative demands placed on your body, mind, and emotions both from external stressors (work, relationships, environment) and internal stressors (thought patterns, emotional regulation, physical strain). Effective self-care involves pacing, prioritizing, and balancing these demands to prevent burnout.
- **Allostatic load** refers to the “wear and tear” the body experiences from chronic stress as it constantly adapts to maintain stability (homeostasis). Over time, excessive allostatic load can lead to fatigue, immune suppression, emotional dysregulation, and cognitive difficulties.

By understanding these concepts, self-care becomes strategic rather than reactive.

You can

1. Identify when your system is overloaded before it manifests in illness or emotional exhaustion.
2. Use layered self-care tools somatic, emotional, cognitive, spiritual to reduce stress, restore balance, and prevent chronic strain.
3. Recognize the importance of rest, recovery, and recovery-oriented behaviors, not just coping strategies, as essential components of long-term well-being.



3rd Variables

Third variables such as grief, trauma, cultural expectations, social roles, environmental stressors, and daily life transitions create additional pressures on the nervous system that go beyond our day-to-day demands. These factors can amplify stress responses, drain emotional capacity, or keep the body in a heightened state of vigilance without us realizing it.

Because we can't always control these influences, self-care becomes essential: it supports regulation, restores balance, and helps the nervous system recover from the weight of these external and internal stressors.

3rd

Variables...

- Grief
- Trauma
- Culture
- Gender
- Socio-Economic
- Religion & Faith
- Spirituality
- Environment
- Travel
- Family
- Professional
- Education
- Weather

Nervous System

When we feel stressed or overwhelmed, we often focus on our **nervous system response** especially fight, flight, freeze, or fawn/submit. A powerful but often overlooked part of this system is the **Vagus nerve**.

What is the Vagus Nerve?

- It's the body's **communication superhighway**, connecting your brain, organs, and sensory input.
- It's a key part of the **parasympathetic nervous system**, responsible for rest, digestion, and calming.

Why Does It Matter?

When you **activate the Vagus nerve**, you improve your ability to: **Link:** [About the Vagus Nerve](#)

- Calm down
- Reduce anxiety
- Regulate your emotions
- Build resilience over time

How Can You Impact It?

You can support and influence your vagus nerve and therefore your nervous system through simple, consistent practices that activate the body's natural calming pathways. Here are some examples:

- **Slow, diaphragmatic breathing:** Deep belly breathing, especially extending the exhale, stimulates the vagus nerve and shifts the body toward a parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) state.
- **Cold exposure:** A splash of cold water on the face, holding an ice pack on the chest, or a brief cold shower activates the dive reflex, which increases vagal tone and slows the heart rate.
- **Humming, chanting, or singing:** Because the vagus nerve connects to the vocal cords, vibration from sound helps stimulate it and support relaxation.
- **Gentle movement:** Yoga, stretching, walking, and slow rhythmic motion (like rocking) help regulate the vagus nerve by promoting body awareness, breath coordination, and physical ease.
- **Social connection:** Warm, safe interaction eye contact, laughter, or supportive touch activates the social engagement system, which is closely intertwined with the vagus nerve.
- **Mindfulness and grounding:** Practices like observing your breath, tuning into the senses, or doing grounding exercises help settle the nervous system and increase vagal regulation.
- **Gut and posture support:** Good digestion, adequate hydration, and upright posture reduce vagal strain and allow for more efficient signaling between the gut and brain.

Strategy

Create your own custom Before | During | After self-care plan for nervous system regulation.

You might want to:

- Highlight a few techniques that resonate most with you.
- Test new ones over time.
- Revisit and adjust based on life circumstances or emotional needs.

Consider:

The “**Core Four**” **gratitude, mindfulness, exercise, and sleep** serve as foundational pillars for any self-care strategy because they directly support the systems that regulate emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being.

- **Gratitude** shifts attention toward what is stable, supportive, or meaningful, helping to counterbalance negativity bias and reduce stress.
- **Mindfulness** trains awareness of thoughts, emotions, and bodily signals, allowing earlier intervention before becoming overwhelmed escalates.
- **Exercise** enhances mood, improves energy regulation, and supports overall nervous system health by releasing tension and strengthening resilience.
- **Sleep** restores the brain and body at the deepest level, repairing stress impacts, supporting memory, and maintaining emotional stability.

Together, these “Core Four” practices create a balanced foundation that strengthens the nervous system, improves coping capacity, and amplifies the effectiveness of all other self-care tools.

Remember:

Novelty and play are essential components of self-care because they nourish parts of the nervous system that routine strategies like exercise and breathing don’t fully reach.

- **Novelty** stimulates curiosity, engagement, and cognitive flexibility, helping the brain break out of rigid stress patterns and access fresh perspectives.
- **Play** activates joy, creativity, and social bonding, offering a natural antidote to chronic stress, emotional heaviness, and burnout.

These experiences remind the body that it’s safe enough to explore, laugh, and imagine, which strengthens resilience and broadens emotional capacity. In this way, self-care becomes not just about calming down, but also about waking up the parts of us that feel alive, spontaneous, and connected.

Nature

“Green” therapy involves the intentional use of nature exposure to support mental and physical well-being is a critical component of self-care. Engaging in nature offers powerful benefits for self-care because the natural environment interacts with the nervous system in ways that modern indoor life often cannot.

Being outdoors reduces cortisol, lowers blood pressure, and activates the parasympathetic system, creating a sense of calm and spaciousness. Natural light helps regulate circadian rhythms, improving sleep, while exposure to greenery enhances mood, attention, and creativity. Time in nature also promotes mindfulness effortlessly: shifting leaves, water patterns, and natural sounds anchor attention without strain.

A helpful framework for understanding how much nature supports well-being is the **Nature Pyramid**, which outlines aspirational levels of outdoor engagement:

- **Daily:** Small doses of nature—like a walk in a local park, sitting near trees, or stepping outside for fresh air—offer quick nervous-system regulation and mental reset.
- **Weekly:** Longer outings, such as hikes, beach visits, or time in larger green spaces, deepen restoration and reduce accumulated stress.
- **Monthly or Seasonally:** Immersive experiences, like day trips or camping, allow for full nervous-system recalibration by removing digital noise and environmental demands.
- **Yearly:** Extended retreats in natural environments provide a profound “reset,” supporting reflection, healing, and long-term wellbeing.

By integrating these levels of nature exposure, “green” therapy reminds the body how to downshift, restore, and reconnect—making it an essential and rejuvenating element of holistic self-care.



Self-Care Tools

Fire Drill: A simple mantra to use in moments of stress: **Stop | Drop | Roll**

1. STOP

- Pause what you're doing or thinking.
- Interrupt the mental or emotional loop.

2. DROP

- Drop into your **body**.
- Scan for tension, racing thoughts, rapid breathing, tightness, or heat.

3. ROLL

- Roll with the situation by:
 - Stepping away (if possible)
 - Engaging in **soothing or regulating strategies**
 - Using a technique, you trust to come back to baseline

Somatic Practices

- Breathwork
- Grounding exercises (5-4-3-2-1 technique)
- Cold exposure (splashing face)
- Progressive muscle relaxation

Sensory Regulation

- Calming music
- Aromatherapy or favorite scents
- Weighted blankets
- Rocking or swaying

Cognitive Tools

- Mindfulness or meditation
- Journaling
- Self-talk and Reframing
- Guided visualization

Behavioral

- Exercise or body movement
- Changing your environment
- Walking, stretching, or yoga
- Getting Outdoors

Connection-Based

- Call or text a trusted person
- Hug someone or pet an animal
- Engage in co-regulation (sync with someone)

Mind-Body Techniques

Engage the body to calm the mind.

- Massage, craniosacral therapy, yoga, or acupuncture
- Diaphragmatic or box breathing (longer exhale than inhale)
 - e.g., Inhale 3s → pause → Exhale 5s → pause
 - e.g., Inhale 4s → pause → Exhale 8s → pause
- Foam rolling and stretching
- Joint rotation scan: toes to ankles to hips to wrists

Movement & Exercise

Activate the aerobic system and regulate energy.

- Walk, run, climb stairs, jump rope, or do Tabata exercises
- Push or pull your body: wall pushes, pull-ups, resistance bands
- Drumming or rhythmic bilateral movement ([Bilateral Stimulation](#))
- Rock side-to-side or hug yourself while standing/sitting
- Raise both arms above your head for 1–2 minutes
- Squeeze clay or tactile objects under your desk

Cold & Sensory Exposure

Use physical sensations to reset your nervous system.

- Hold an ice cube or place hands in cold water (use caution)
- Splash your face with cold water or take a cold shower
- Walk barefoot on sand, grass, or turf
- Rub lotion or oil into your hands or someone else's
- Use a spikey ball, smooth stone, or textured item

Auditory Tools

Disrupt thought patterns or shift your emotional state.

- Hum, buzz like a bee, or chant “om”
- Listen to uplifting music or binaural beats ([Binaural Beats](#))
- Sing a song or favorite lullaby
- Rotate to “palms up” posture while seated and listen to silence

Grounding & Mindfulness

Bring awareness into the present moment.

- Finger labyrinth ([Finger Labyrinth](#)) or walk a labyrinth ([Labyrinth Locator](#))
- Visualization or guided imagery
 - e.g., Imagine yourself laughing with friends or sitting on a beach
- Loving-kindness/Metta meditation
- Practice awe—connect with something bigger than yourself

Creative Disruption

Express, explore, or break mental loops.

- Journaling (emotional release or gratitude)
- Creative writing, poetry, or art
- Blind contour drawing ([Resource](#))
- Set up a puzzle table or coloring area
- Knitting, crocheting, mending clothes, or jewelry making

Cognitive & Social Tools

Engage the brain to redirect emotional processing.

- Use 2nd or 3rd person self-talk (e.g., “You’ve got this.”)
- Gratitude journaling or self-reflection
- Play an ongoing game: chess, sudoku, card games, etc.
- Help someone else: lend a hand or be a good listener
- Use humor: draw comics, watch funny videos

Tactile & Sensory

Keep calming items nearby.

- Create a “busy box” with tactile or repairable items
- Keep fidget tools like putty, stress balls, or sensory cubes
- Build a desktop plant garden to nurture and tend

Quick Techniques (in a pinch)

Regulate fast when you feel overwhelmed.

- Gargle liquid
- Chew gum
- Juggle
- Swing a golf club
- Focus on a “balancing bird” toy
- Do a quick task or chore

Watch | Listen

Link: [Box Breathing](#)

Link: [About Mindfulness](#)

Link: [1 Minute Mindfulness](#)

Link: [5 Minute Mindfulness](#)

Link: [10 Minute Mindfulness](#)

Link: [Body Scan](#)

Link: [About Yoga Nidra](#)

Link: [Yoga Nidra](#)

Link: [PMR](#)

Link: [Shaking - Stress Relief](#)

Link: [QIGONG Routine](#)

Link: [Silk Reeling \(Tai Chi\)](#)

Link: [ICE or COLD WATER](#)

Link: [Tapping](#)

Link: [EMDR](#)

Link: [Neuro-Emotional \(NET\)](#)

Link: [Trauma Releasing \(TRE\)](#)

Link: [Third Person Self-Talk](#)

Link: [Loving Kindness](#)

Link: [CranioSacral Therapy](#)

Link: [Binaural Beats](#)

Link: [What is AWE?](#)

Link: [5 Minute Foam Rolling](#)

Link: [Try a Labyrinth](#)

Closing Reminder: “The key is flexibility and diversifying, not perfection.”

Self-care is a lifelong practice. What works today might not work tomorrow, and that's okay. Let yourself experiment, reflect, and evolve to build a flexible and diverse self-care toolkit.

Implementation Intention:

Setting an implementation intention supports self-care by turning good intentions into concrete, automatic actions.

Instead of relying on motivation alone, it creates a clear “if-then” plan.

- For example: *“If it’s 8 p.m., then I’ll start my wind-down routine,”* or *“If I feel overwhelmed, then I’ll step outside for three minutes.”*

This structure reduces decision fatigue, increases follow-through, and helps new habits become more consistent. By linking a specific cue to a specific behavior, implementation intentions make self-care easier to initiate, harder to forget, and more integrated into daily life.

PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	EMOTIONAL
EAT REGULARLY EAT HEALTHY WALK DO STAIRS TRY A LABYRINTH YOGA NIDRA YOGA QIGONG GET A MASSAGE ACCUPUNCTURE TAKE TIME OFF WHEN SICK MAKE TIME TO SLEEP TRY PMR EXERCISE AEROBICALLY SWIM HAVE A DANCE PARTY TRY SHAKING DO A CHORE ORGANIZE A DRAWER WALK BAREFOOT ON GRASS SAND RUN WALK WITH OTHERS SING HUM BREATHE CONNECT HUG HOLD HANDS TAKE A LONG SHOWER BATH STRETCH THE BODY FOAM ROLLER LEARN TAPPING EXERCISES	TAKE DAY TRIPS LOCAL STAY-CATIONS VISUALIZE REFLECT HOW TO SHOW UP RESTRICT PHONE TIME EMAIL INTERNET CREATE PERSONAL AFFIRMATIONS PRACTICE 2nd & 3rd PERSON SELF-TALK REMOVE NEWS FEEDS & SOCIAL MEDIA USE ICE COLD WATER TO SHIFT ATTENTION IDENTIFY YOUR SUPERPOWERS INVENTORY YOUR THOUGHT PATTERNS IDENTIFY WHAT MATTERS TO YOU CREATE YOUR LIST OF NEEDS WANTS CREATE A WORRY LIST WONDER OUT LOUD TRY TO JOURNAL DUMP PAD READ EXPLORE PUZZLE LEARN SOMETHING NEW HOW TO KNIT TRY BINAURAL BEATS MUSIC	SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS CONTACT IMPORTANT PEOPLE PRACTICE LOVING KINDNESS METTA EXPLORE WHAT STIMULATES YOUR SENSES RE-VISIT FAVORITE BOOKS MOVIES ENGAGE IN COMFORTING ACTIVITIES REFLECT THROUGH OBJECTS OF MEANING REFLECT UPON INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE RECALL PLACES OF JOY COMFORT PERMISSION TO BE EMOTIONAL BE OPEN TO CRY LAUGH MOURN WATCH SOMETHING FUNNY SAD PROCESS FRUSTRATION TAKE PART IN SOCIAL ACTION MARCHES WRITE OR REVIEW LETTERS MAKE DONATIONS HELP OTHERS
I will move my body by DOING: <div></div>	I will pay attention to my thoughts by DOING: <div></div>	I will practice honoring my emotions by DOING: <div></div>