

The Truth About Self-Care

We often hear or read about self-care and its many science-backed benefits. However, the concept is so commonly used that, for some of us, the real meaning seems to have gotten lost. As a result, the promise of what we stand to gain from practicing self-care can become diminished, causing many of us to ignore or give up on committing to it. What self-care really is and looks like may surprise you, and with a better understanding of both, you can begin to take care of yourself in more meaningful and effective ways.

What self-care is

Self-care is an ongoing daily practice that, when done consistently, works to ensure you stay healthy and well and that you're able to perform productively at work, handle responsibilities at home, accomplish goals, and care for others. It involves prioritizing and attending to your physical, mental, and emotional well-being and consciously engaging in specific activities, behaviors, and choices that allow you to do so.

What self-care is not

Although the word itself and its definition may suggest otherwise, the one thing that self-care is not is *selfish*. The idea that self-care is self-centered or self-absorbed is precisely why many people find it difficult to deliberately focus on taking care of themselves. It's in our nature to put others first when, in fact, regularly taking good care of yourself does just as much good for those around you as it does for you.

Self-care is also not about occasionally spoiling yourself with one-off indulgences. A day of pampering at the spa, splurging on a purchase, and ditching chores for the weekend are all fine to do now and again, but truly benefitting from self-care isn't achieved by simply peppering in a few fleeting moments of pleasure here or there.

Examples of genuine self-care

- Freeing yourself from the need to constantly satisfy or be there for everyone
- Loving and appreciating the things that make you who you are and not comparing yourself to the lives of others or what society says you or your life should be
- Setting boundaries to manage or cut toxic people out of your life when they don't contribute anything positive
- Not giving in to the temptation to engage with people, things, or habits that keep you anchored to an unhealthy past
- Allowing yourself to go after something that you've always wanted to pursue – a goal, dream, or special project at work – because you're too afraid to disrupt what's easy and comfortable
- Recognizing that you can't do everything by yourself and that it's not a sign of failure and seeking help from friends, family, or a professional
- Asking for what you need instead of assuming that others will or should already know
- Deciding to no longer give all of yourself to a role or relationship that doesn't serve you in positive, fulfilling ways
- Understanding your triggers and knowing what to do in stressful moments to bring you back to your baseline
- Feeling at ease to say no when you don't have the time, mental capacity, or energy to do one more thing, even if it means hurting or disappointing someone you care about
- Taking a time-out to clear your head instead of reacting in the moment without thinking through things first
- Being accountable for, and learning from, your actions and mistakes as opposed to dwelling on them and feeling guilty or shameful
- Recognizing when it's time for a break and taking all the time away from work that you're entitled to
- Keeping a journal
- Believing in yourself
- Forgiving those who've hurt or slighted you and releasing yourself from the anger and grudges that make you resentful
- Forgiving yourself, and understanding and accepting that you're not perfect
- Being financially literate and having a plan for your future

- Calming your mind each day with mindfulness or meditation practices
- Forgoing social media or other distractions for a restful night of sleep
- Staying committed to self-care despite any judgement or flack you may get from others who don't understand or agree with the choices you've made to uphold it

For more self-care advice, reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Consultants are available any time day or night to help you prioritize and take better care of yourself.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

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