

SELF-CARE RESOURCES

This resource guide presents a list of self-care activities with established benefits. There are many self-care activities available beyond those listed here. Self-care is about taking active steps to promote your own well-being. Like any skill, self-care exercises become easier and more effective with practice and repetition. Below, we present a list of self-care exercises with a brief description of the exercise, the benefit of the exercise, and a link to sources that you may use to guide you through using them.

These sites provide a nice, brief description of self-care with a list of various self-care categories.

<https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/what-is-self-care/>

<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/selfcare.html>

STRESS & RELAXATION

When we become anxious or stressed, our bodies react by releasing chemicals designed to increase our ability to confront and deal with a problem we are facing. Part of this reaction produces tense muscles and changes in how we breathe. It also has a strong impact on our attention and ability to concentrate. The resources offered here provide strategies that you can use to increase your sense of wellbeing, and reduce the effects of stress and anxiety.

1

BREATHING EXERCISES

a) This site provides descriptions and instructions for slow, deep breathing techniques that with practice can increase relaxation:

<https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2255>

b) This site provides a description of breathing to achieve relaxation and includes four different visual aids you may choose from to time and synchronize your breathing:

<https://dailyburn.com/life/lifestyle/stressed-gifs-breathing-exercises/>

2

MUSCLE RELAXATION

When we are dealing with stress in our lives, our muscles can become tense. We can become so used to carrying around this tension that we no longer realize we are tense. Progressive muscle relaxation is an excellent technique for relieving tension in your muscle and promoting a greater sense of relaxation. It

is a simple and effective technique because because it relies on physical responses that naturally happen in your body when you purposefully tense a muscle. This site provides a number of resources to assist you in learning and practicing progressive muscle relaxation. It includes basic instructions, written scripts, and video scripts to guide you through progressive muscle relaxation <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/progressive-muscle-relaxation-pmr/#steps-pmr>.

3 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & EXERCISE

Exercise provides many benefits including maintaining good health. It is an excellent way to reduce stress, and intense exercise can produce chemicals called endorphins that create a pleasant feeling. However, exercise does not need to be intense to provide great benefits for reducing stress. When we are in a state of stress, our emotions can sometimes feel like they are taking us over. Feelings of sadness or anxiety can begin to consume our thoughts and attention. During times like these, activities such as exercise or meditation are great ways to release stress and calm the mind. Exercises such as Yoga, and Tai Chi emphasize a focus of the mind on the body. This focus can reduce feelings of distress by centering our attention on our bodies, and grounding us.

a) Walking - The act of taking a walk can offer the same kinds of benefits. Walking through a peaceful

b) Yoga <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201403/yoga-has-potent-health-benefits>

c) Tai Chi The Mayo clinic offers a nice summary of the benefits of Tai Chi as an exercise shown to reduce stress and improve health <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/tai-chi/art-20045184>. This site provides a nationwide locator you can use to find Tai Chi classes in your area <http://www.americantaichi.net/TaiChiQigongClass.asp>.

4 MEDITATION

Stress and anxiety can consume much of our mental energy as well as exert an impact on our physical wellbeing. Meditation exercises can help us to regain control over the focus of our thoughts and manage our emotional experiences. This site from the University of California at Los Angeles includes an introduction to meditation with an explanation of how it works as well as free recorded meditation scripts you can use to guide you through meditation exercises <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations>.

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RECREATION & LEISURE ACTIVITY

When life demands, being busy, and stressful events take hold of our days, we often sacrifice recreation and leisure in order to make time to meet such demands. Ironically, we sacrifice an important aspect of caring for ourselves in pursuit of addressing life's demands. This site explores the benefits provided by leisure activities <https://plentifun.com/importance-of-leisure> and recreational activities <https://www.metroparks.com/importance-leisure-recreation-health/>. Each page has many links you may access to explore categories of leisure or recreational activities along with many links to free guides for new leisure activities you may want to try for the first time.

6

SLEEP HYGIENE

Maintaining healthy sleep habits is one of the most important things we can do to promote and maintain our wellbeing. You may have noticed that when you are sleep deprived you might feel less in control of your emotional reactions, or experience your emotions as more intense. Good sleep practices not only benefit our physical health, but ensure we have the mental and emotional resources we need to deal with the challenges we may face in life. This site from The American Alliance for Healthy Sleep provides information that emphasizes the importance of sleep hygiene, a list of quick tips for good sleep hygiene, and detailed information on steps you can take to improve or maintain your sleep hygiene <http://sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits>.