



Self-Care: Physical & Sensory - activity -

Prepared by Root Cuthbertson 2020
Based on an article by Katherine Hurst 2018

*This **Self-Care: Physical & Sensory guide** is one of six in this Self-Care series, the other five are: **Nature, Emotional, Social, Mental and Worldview guide.***

Self-Care: An Introduction

Most people benefit from at least some kind of self-care, although individuals may prefer different kinds. Not all kinds of self-care are for everyone.

Self-care is about cultivating personal resilience, knowing when an individual's inner resources are getting low and it's time to replenish. Self-care is also about the integration of compassion, in individuals and in groups, to prevent burnout. Individuals and groups can prioritise self-care in order to bring more good energy to anything they do, including group activities.

Self-care may feel like a privilege for those who have access to resources like time, money, or social status. For others, who may lack access to resources, self-care can feel like yet another task on an over-full to-do list. Self-care may even be an unhelpful term, if it perpetuates the negative attitudes toward care which are common in Doing cultures. Community organiser Nakita Valerio suggests that '**community-care**' may be more helpful. She writes: "Self-care is about the individual caring for their own basic physical needs, whereas community care is focused on the collective: taking care of people together, for everything from basic physical needs to psychological and even spiritual ones. Community care is a recognition of the undeniable cooperative and social nature of human beings and involves a commitment to reduce harm simply through being together."

Researchers Emily & Amelia Nagoski point out that care, in general, is commonly devalued in Doing cultures, where care can typically become marginalised, something an individual tends by themselves, rather than being shared or tended by a community. They argue that everyone needs care, for self and for others, in networks of kindness and compassion. Ideally, an Inner Transition aims to re-frame care from something done alone — as if it were selfish, wrong, or shameful — toward normalised activities that individuals can do for both themselves and for others.

What Self-Care is Not

Self-care is not the same as anything that feels good. Modern societies offer many 'quick-fix' temptations based on unhealthy coping mechanisms that are potentially destructive or harmful long-term: things like drugs, alcohol, caffeine, overeating, gambling, or excessive risk-taking. These provide temporary relief at best, and are not long-term solutions, or foundations of self-care.

Avoiding Self-Care

Someone might avoid self-care for many reasons. Typically, these are based on a personal history where self-care was not encouraged. In addition, the cultural norms in most modern societies tend to favour attributes such as strength, youth, vitality and conversely care or rest can be seen as a form of weakness. This can result in beliefs such as:

- people in general do not deserve or need self-care, so neither does any specific individual.
- there will be bad consequences for self-care.
- my important relationships will be affected in a negative way.
- it involves too many difficult transactions, and isn't worth it.
- it may help other people, but it is not suitable for me.
- self-care has an 'expensive' cost in money or time, so it is best kept to a minimum.

Self-care practices are good for us! Exercise, creativity, rest, touch, social connection, time in nature (to name some examples) have long-term benefits on all levels: physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and for worldview.

Self-Care Benefits: Physical & Sensory

- physical health & well-being
- reduced stress, tension, or upset stomach
- increased resistance to disease, improved immune system, reduced illness
- sound sleep; physical vitality for any activity
- sensory integration; reduced sensory processing disorder
- nervous system regulation

Self-Care: Physical

- Physical self-care includes many activities that benefit the physical body like sleep, nourishment, and exercise. Here are a range of practices that help maintain optimum physical well-being. Experiment to see which ones you find the most rewarding and try to build them into your daily or weekly routines:
- Aim for **7-9 hours of sleep** each night. Most people benefit from getting a good night's sleep. Bonus: 30 minutes before sleeping, reduce exposure to the blue light of screens; or simply turn off all devices.

- Aim to **drink more water**, up to 8 glasses (between 1.2– 2.0 liters) per day. While the amount varies depending on body size and environmental factors, drinking plenty of water is beneficial in many ways.
- 20+ seconds to **reduce eye strain** and fatigue. If you regularly look at a screen – computer, tablet, smartphone, gaming, television – take a break every 20 minutes to look at something at least 20 feet (7 meters) away for at least 20 seconds.
- 10+ minutes to **give yourself a massage**. Related to physical self-soothing, self-massage can be particularly helpful for the eyes, jaw, face, neck, and head. Seek a little guidance, like an online video, to prevent harm.
- 15+ minutes to add **yoga, chi gung, or tai chi** to your daily or weekly routine. Try any of these, or similar traditional practices, for simple stretching and movement. Some practices can be beneficial for people with restricted mobility.
- 20 minutes to add a **nap** to your daily or weekly routine. An ancient tradition in several cultures, short and regular naps can have many benefits, especially in the afternoon. Even lying down and resting with shoes off can be restorative.
- 20+ minutes for **aerobic exercise**, ideally daily or at least 3 times a week. Options include jogging, cycling, hiking, swimming, dancing, sports, playing, etc. Elevating the heart rate can be beneficial in many ways. Please don't push yourself to exercise if you're unwell.
- 30 minutes to add a **walk** to your daily routine. This simple form of exercise combines easily with other activities. Bonus: find a new route in your local area and notice 5 things you appreciate that you hadn't noticed before.
- 30+ minutes to cook yourself a **nutritious meal**, either one of your favorites, or one you've never cooked before. To reduce stress, follow a simple recipe, and try to have fun.
- 30+ minutes to either treat yourself to a **professional massage** (if you have the financial means), or ask a trusted person in your life for some body work (back/shoulder rub, hand massage etc.) or do some self-massage (examples [here](#)). Some kinds of massage are more vigorous, like shiatsu, Rolfing, Thai, or myofascial release. Others are more gentle, like Swedish, craniosacral, or Lomi Lomi.
- 3+ minutes **hugging someone** you love. This could be a pet, a friend, or yourself. Light pressure and physical compression release the hormone oxytocin, which increases a sense of well-being.

Self-Care: Sensory

Sensory self-care can certainly be about pleasure, but it is primarily for calming and regulating the nervous system. An activated nervous system can elevate the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol (see [Guide to the Nervous System](#)). Sensory self-care can help return the nervous system to its baseline state of social engagement.

5+ minutes following the movements of your own **breathing**. Traditions from several cultures focus on the breath. Try a few, like lengthening your exhale, or counting. Notice the physical sensations in your diaphragm, belly, chest, nose, and throat.

5+ minutes **touching something soft** & fuzzy with your skin. Tactile soothing and slow, affective touching can help to calm most mammals. Try a silk scarf, fur, sheepskin, plush toys, or a favorite blanket.

5+ minutes enjoying the sensations (aroma, temperature, mouthfeel) of **your favorite beverage**. Could you find some evocative phrases, like in wine-tasting, to describe it to someone else?

5+ minutes dissolving something **absolutely delicious** (e.g. chocolate) on your tongue. How does the flavour change over time? Notice the beginning, middle, and end of the tasting experience. Close your eyes if it helps.

8+ minutes **enjoying aromas**, like incense, aromatherapy, or the smell of fresh flowers. In the brain, the sense of smell is linked to memory. What memories do certain scents evoke for you?

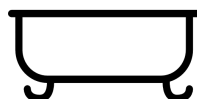
8+ minutes studying and **appreciating beauty**, either in art or nature. Notice fine details, contrasts, or similarities. What is pleasing to your eye? How would you help someone else see what you see?

8+ minutes **moving like an animal**, as if preparing for a game of charades. Miming activates mirror neurons, as well as the proprioceptive and vestibular senses involving spatial awareness and balance. Bonus challenge: try some unusual patterns like being upside down, or moving backwards.

10+ minutes **watching the flames** of a candle or campfire. The human relationship and fascination with fire is ancient. Try focusing, meditating, or allowing your mind to wander.

12+ minutes **listening to music** with your eyes closed. Music is one of the fastest ways to change your mood. Try listening to three of your favorite songs in a row. Can you discern a sound you've never noticed before?

20+ minutes **soaking in a hot bath**. Beneficial on many levels, hot baths have a long history in several cultures. Bonus challenge: to increase circulation and heart rate, try alternating a hot bath with a cold plunge, up to three times.



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