



Self Care: Nature - activity -

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

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

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.

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: Nature

Self-care in nature can combine the benefits of all the other types of self-care: physical, sensory, mental, worldview, emotional, and social. The human nervous system evolved in nature, and it is still designed to respond to the signals that nature provides. Some health care providers are now writing prescriptions for time in nature to alleviate symptoms like hypertension, stress, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression. In her book *Kith*, author Jay Griffiths explores how children who grow up with time in nature have fewer such health problems.

Here are some practices to try, with an awareness of preventing accident, harm, or injury. Even if you only have a short time, you can try some self-care in nature!

5+ minutes for a **sensory walk** in a natural environment paying particular attention to your sense of **smell and touch**. Nature is full of scents and textures which may remind you of past experiences. Take a tour and see if you can smell and/or touch more than 10 natural things. Are they pleasant or unpleasant? Bonus challenge: Can you smell the weather changing?

8+ minutes to **walk barefoot** on the grass, on sand, or in the soil. Explore the tactile sensations in your feet, starting with an easy or soft area. Bonus challenge: without harming, try walking barefoot on rougher ground. How does this change the way you walk?

8+ minutes to **listen to natural sounds**: insects, birds, animals, plants, wind, water. Make a list of all the distinct things you can hear. Notice also how much silence you can hear. How many seconds of silence can you count? Bonus: learn the 5 identifiable patterns of bird language which reveal many aspects about natural goings-on in the landscape.

10+ minutes to **ground yourself**: place a part of your body – feet, hands, back – on the earth without any rubber or insulation. The simplest way is to remove your rubber-soled shoes. Clint Ober's research has shown that grounding reduces inflammation in the body and can result in many physical benefits.

10+ minutes being in or near **natural water**: a spring, river, waterfall, wetland, pond, lake, or sea. Water features – especially waterfalls or seashores with big waves – are great sources of the Leonard Effect, producing negative ions which provide many health benefits. The senses also benefit from being near water: the sound and feel of it, the smell and taste. Bonus: get in the water for a refreshing splash, a quick dip, or a proper swim.

10+ minutes for **cloud watching**. Let your mind drift, let your thoughts wander. Enjoy the shapes and what memories they bring, or simply be present in the moment. Many people are inspired by clouds to make art, poetry, or music. The Cloud Appreciation Society is one online group where cloud-watchers can share images and appreciations.

12+ minutes for **forest bathing**. Originally from Japan, this practice emphasizes time in any natural or green space with many plants, ideally a forest or woodland. The exposure to increased oxygen is beneficial, as well as slowing down to appreciate the many ways that plants support life.

12+ minutes for **stargazing** and observing the night sky. For generations humans have been inspired by the patterns in the stars. What traditional stories have you heard? Other celestial wonders include the moon, planets, satellites, or aurora borealis. Bonus: choose a night with a special event, like a lunar eclipse, a meteor shower, a comet, or a cascade of shooting stars.

15+ minutes to **soak up the sunshine**. While preventing sunburn is important, sunshine can be beneficial at an indirect angle either early or late in the day. Sunlight is a good source of mood-enhancing vitamin D, valuable in places where the days are short. Unfiltered sunlight, perceived by the eyes without sunglasses, affects the production of melanin in the skin; it also helps to set the circadian rhythms, important for getting a good night's sleep. Bonus: Try 30+ minutes of unfiltered sunlight early in the day, even if it's cloudy.

15+ minutes a day for several days to **celebrate the season**. Appreciate the natural sights, sounds, textures, smells, and flavors that are available at this time of year. Touch, listen, smell, taste, and observe closely. For example: the smells after the first rain; the crunch of dry leaves underfoot; the sounds of migrating birds; the flavor of a ripe fruit. What are your favorite things about this season? How do they relate to your previous experiences? Have you discovered any new favorites this year?

15+ minutes. Write in a **nature journal** about your observations in nature. Pick one specific spot and report on any changes you notice. Try doodling or inventing small poems. Or take inspiration from other great nature writers, and see if you can paint a picture or conjure an experience with your words. Bonus challenge: Write in your journal 3+ times per week.

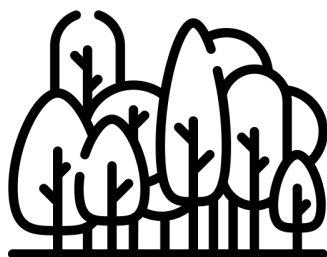
20+ minutes for **hammock time**. An ancient and versatile technology, a hammock can either be elaborate or made of simple materials that are easy to carry, set-up, and take-down. If you don't have one, try making your own or borrowing someone else's. Hammocks are great for an outdoor nap or other quiet activities. Bonus: elevating your feet over your heart has many benefits.

20+ minutes to **wander in nature** with no agenda. Go off-trail. See where your curiosity leads you. Follow the sunlight, or insects, or your intuition. A lack of agenda helps to reduce stress and can be quite restorative. What aspects of nature capture your attention, or bring you joy?

20+ minutes to **forage in nature** with a clear objective. Try beachcombing for smooth stones, driftwood, or seashells. Hunt for natural art materials like rock pigments, feathers, thorns, large leaves for origami, flowers, grasses or reeds for weaving or basketry. After some guidance on preventing harm, forage for wild edibles like berries, nuts, seeds, mushrooms, or medicinal herbs.

4+ hours for an **outdoor adventure**. To prevent harm, most adventures require preparation, guidance, and appropriate gear. Try a simple adventure like exploring a nearby area for the first time, or geo-caching in locations that involve mapping and orienteering. Other options: hiking, rock-climbing, tree-climbing, parkour, hill-running, sledding, kayaking, surfing, snorkeling, cycling, mountain biking, horse-riding, etc.

6+ hours for a **digital detox**. If your nervous system is affected by screens and electronics on a daily basis, going natural for a half-day can have many health benefits. Try out an analog existence by turning off all your electronic devices, including routers, bases, and repeaters. Learn a skill, handicraft, or activity your ancestors would have recognized. Bonus: take yourself to a natural area far away from all EMFs (electromagnetic frequencies) and WiFi (wireless fidelity networks).



Related links

Great example from the Transition movement where a (London, UK) Transition group and GP surgery have collaborated to make a garden/nature space as part of the health offer: <http://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/happy-birthday-nhs-gp-surgery-in-kentish-town-joins-the-party>

Self-Care: Physical and Sensory

Self-Care: Mental

Self-Care: Emotional

Self-Care: Social

Self-Care: Worldview

References

Hurst, Katherine. "What Is Self-Care and Why Is Self-Care Important?" 2018.

www.thelawofattraction.com/self-care-tips

Bexelius, Michelle. "Top 5 Ways to Boost Your Health and Reduce Your Exposure to EMFs at Work." 2020.

<https://workinmind.org/2020/03/19/top-5-ways-to-boost-your-health-and-reduce-your-exposure-to-emfs-at-work/>

Cloud Appreciation Society -

<https://cloudappreciationsociety.org/>

Forest Bathing -

https://www.appropedia.org/Forest_bathing

Green Prescribing.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/feb/10/health-prescriptions-doctors-healthcare-fitness-exercise-parks>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/nature-prescribed-to-help-health/>

https://nhsforest.org/sites/default/files/Dose_of_Nature_evidence_report_0.pdf

Griffiths, Jay. *Kith: The Riddle of the Childscape*.

Hamish Hamilton 2013.

Grounding/Earthing. Ober, Clint. Stephen Sinatra, Laura Koniver, Joseph Mercola.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qn_YnLudgg

Negative ions in natural environments. The Leonard Effect.

<https://www.n-ion.com/e/faq-02-all.html>

Peters, Brandon. "Get Morning Sunlight and You'll Sleep Better."

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/morning-sunlight-exposure-3973908>

Vayuvegula, Satish. "What Are the Health Benefits of Elevating Your Legs?"

<https://www.veinclinics.com/blog/what-are-health-benefits-elevating-your-legs/>

Young, Jon. *What the Robin Knows: How Birds*

Reveal the Secrets of the Natural World. Houghton Mifflin 2012.

This document, prepared by Root Cuthbertson, is released under <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

Graphic used: Flaticon.com