

# Self-Care For Mental Health



## Introduction

Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. It includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how a person thinks, feels, acts, makes choices, and relates to others. It encompasses the thoughts, behaviors, and activities that are essential to an individual's overall health and quality of life. Self-care can play a role in maintaining someone's mental health and/or help support their treatment for anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders.

## What Is Self-Care?

Self-care is the practice of taking time to do things that help an individual live well and improve their physical and mental health. Self-care can support someone's efforts to manage stress, lower their risk of illness, and increase energy. Even small acts of self-care in a person's daily life can have a big impact.

Here are some tips to help someone get started with self-care:

- Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. It includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being.
  - Self-care can play a role in maintaining someone's mental health and/or help support treatment and recovery for anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders.
  - Self-care involves taking time to do things that help an individual live well and improve their physical and mental health.
  - Examples of self-care include: getting regular exercise; eating regular, healthy meals; prioritizing sleep; relaxing; practicing gratitude; and staying connected.
- **Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes of walking every day can boost a person's mood and improve their health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so no one should be discouraged if they can't do 30 minutes at one time. Running, swimming, bike riding, hiking, Tai-Chi, and yoga are other forms of exercise that people may enjoy. Individuals should always talk to a medical professional before starting a new exercise program.
  - **Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated.** A balanced diet of whole grains, lean protein, and plenty of vegetables, fruit, and water can improve a person's energy and focus throughout the day.
  - **Make sleep a priority.** A sleep schedule that includes a set bedtime and allows for 7-9 hours of sleep each night will help someone feel more rested. Blue light exposure from computers and other devices can make it difficult to fall asleep and interfere with circadian rhythms. People should reduce blue light exposure 1-2 hours before bedtime to ensure quality sleep.
  - **Try a relaxing activity.** Each individual is unique, and an activity that helps one person relax may not work for another. There are several relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which incorporate journaling, meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. People are encouraged to schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities that provide enjoyment.



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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

- **Set goals and priorities.** Deciding each day what must get done and what can wait helps someone reduce their risk of becoming overscheduled, overwhelmed, and exhausted. Focusing on what has been accomplished rather than on what is left to do ensures the individual feels a sense of satisfaction.
- **Practice gratitude.** A person can improve their mood and outlook on life by writing down or replaying in their mind the specific people, places, events, and things that they are grateful for each day.
- **Focus on positivity.** An individual can teach their brain to focus on positive thoughts and events by recognizing and challenging negative or unhelpful thoughts when they arise.
- **Stay connected.** Everyone can seek emotional support and practical help from friends or family members. Pets can also provide comfort and connection during tough times.

Self-care looks different for everyone, and it is important for each person to find what they need and enjoy. It may take trial and error to discover what works best. In addition, although self-care is not a cure for mental illnesses, understanding what causes or triggers mild symptoms and which coping techniques are most effective can help someone manage their mental health.

### When To Seek Professional Help

An individual should seek professional help if they experience severe or distressing symptoms that have lasted two weeks or more, such as:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Appetite changes that result in unwanted weight changes
- Struggling to get out of bed in the morning because of mood
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of interest in things they usually find enjoyable
- Inability to perform usual daily functions and responsibilities

A person should not wait until their symptoms become overwhelming. Encourage them to talk about their concerns with their primary care provider, who can refer them to a mental health professional if needed.

### What To Do In A Crisis

If someone is struggling with mental health symptoms or having thoughts of suicide, they can call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or chat at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org). This service is confidential, free, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In life-threatening situations, call **911**.

### Connecticut Resources

**CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
[www.ct.gov/DMHAS](http://www.ct.gov/DMHAS)

**24/7 Access Line**  
 1.800.563.4086

**2-1-1 of Connecticut**  
[www.211ct.org](http://www.211ct.org) or call 2-1-1

### National Resources

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**  
 Call or text 988 or chat at [www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org)

