

Importance of self-care planning

COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing resources



What this fact sheet covers:

- Self-care explained
- Creating a self-care plan
- Personal planning templates

Self-care is an important part of daily life, however during times of uncertainty and this unprecedented situation with COVID-19 the need for self-care is imperative.

Self-care is often the first thing that gets sacrificed when life is busy and stressful, and people often think that taking time for themselves seems indulgent. But looking after your own wellbeing will help you get through this challenging time, and will help you to better care for others.

Amidst the confusion and constant stream of information due to COVID-19, a self-care plan can help you focus, make decisions and stay healthy.

“Please put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others!” Many of us have heard this important rule on flight safety recordings but it’s a useful phrase to remind us about the importance of self-care – if you don’t look after yourself first, you won’t be able to help yourself or others.

What is self-care?

Self-care refers to the activities and practices that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing.

Self-care helps to prevent stress and anxiety

By incorporating self-care activities into your regular routine, like going for a walk or socializing with friends, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate, so you can avoid or reduce the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Self-care makes you more effective

When you take time for yourself and give your body the food, rest, and activity it needs, you will actually have more energy to meet the demands of daily life – however unusual they might be. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you be more productive and more resilient to stressors.



How to create a self-care plan

Step 1 | Evaluate your coping skills

Examining your own habits is an important first step in developing a self-care plan. How do you typically deal with life's demands? Can you identify when you need to take a break?

When faced with challenges, we can use either positive coping strategies or negative coping strategies. Below are a few examples of each.

Which strategies do you use?

Positive	Negative
Deep breathing	Yelling
Listening to music	Smoking
Exercising	Pacing
Meditation	Skipping meals
Reading	Drinking alcohol to excess
Connecting with others	Withdrawal from friends and family
Engaging in a hobby	Biting fingernails

It's important to be honest when evaluating your behaviours. If you find yourself unable to cope with a situation or feeling angry, snappy with others, or anxious, take a deep breath and refocus. It may be time to re-evaluate your go-to coping skills.

Step 2 | Identify your daily self-care needs

Take a moment to consider what you value and need in your everyday life. Then consider what you value and need during these difficult times of uncertainty. It may not seem like the right time to be planning, but time spent now will reap benefits later if you can get a plan in place.

Remember that self-care extends far beyond your basic physical needs; consider your psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and workplace wellbeing.

You will find a template for '*Identifying needs*' at the end of this fact sheet that you can print off. This template contains useful examples to get you started.

Step 3 | Reflect. Examine. Replace.

Reflect

Reflect on the existing coping strategies you have identified have outlined in the previous activities. What's working? What isn't working?

Keep the helpful tools and remove anything that is unhelpful.



Examine

Are there barriers to maintaining your self-care? Examine how you can address these barriers.

Start taking steps toward incorporating new strategies that will benefit your health and well-being.

Replace

Work on reducing, and then eliminating, negative coping strategies. If you find yourself using negative strategies, then begin by choosing one action you feel is most harmful and identify a positive strategy to replace it.

Positive coping skills are an important part of your self-care toolkit.

Step 4 | Create your Self-care plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategies, write them down. Your self-care plan can be as simple or as detailed as you need it to be. You may choose to keep a detailed plan on your desk and carry a simplified version in your wallet, in your purse, or on your phone.

Look at it regularly, keep going back to it and refining it as the situation with COVID-19 develops.

You will find a template for your '*Personal Self-Care Plan*' at the end of this fact sheet that you can print off and fill out.

We will be providing more updates and resources on blackdoginstitute.org.au/covid-19 to assist with the unfolding situation around COVID-19.



In addition to your self-care planning, it is important to find an approach that **SETTLES** the mind.

Our advice is:

Stay focused on the here and now and avoid thinking too far into the future and take each day one step at a time.

Engage and stay connected to friends, family and support networks. Working together with communities, united as a country we can move through this.

Thoughts are thoughts, not necessarily facts. Be alert to negative thoughts and don't give them power.

Treat people with kindness, support others through this time of uncertainty.

Limit information and time on unhelpful media. Constant exposure to anxiety-fuelling stories drives panic and uncertainty.

Exercise is key, research shows that good physical health is critical for a healthy mind, focus on good sleep, eating well and working out.

Seek help, if you are concerned about yourself or others talk to your GP, the Black Dog online clinic is a good place to start with a self-assessment.

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Creating a mentally healthier world



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Template 1: Identifying needs

Daily self-care

What are you doing to support your overall well-being on a day-to-day basis? Do you engage in self-care practices now? Are you more active in some areas of self-care than others?

Use the table below to help you determine which areas may need more support.

Area of self-care	Current practices	Practices to try
Physical e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups		
Emotional e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge my own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way		
Spiritual e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections		
Professional e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills		
Social e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends		
Financial e.g. understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, pay off debt		
Psychological e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, learn new skills, access psychotherapy, life coaching, or counselling support through your EAP if needed		



Template 1: Identifying needs (continued)

Emergency self-care

When you are faced with a crisis, you likely won't have time to create a coping strategy. Take time to develop a plan in advance so it's there when you need it.

Try completing the following table to help identify your unique self-care needs during times of distress.

Emergency self-care strategies	Helpful	Unhelpful
Relaxation and staying calm Which activities help you to relax? e.g. deep breathing, taking a walk Which activities make you more agitated or frustrated? e.g. yelling, swearing, or drinking		
Self-Talk Helpful self-talk may include, "I am safe/I can do this." Harmful self-talk may include, "I can't handle this/I knew this would happen/I deserve this."		
Social support Which family members and friends can you reach out to for help or support? Which people should you avoid during times of stress? Be honest about who helps and who zaps your energy.		
Mood Which activities support a positive mood? e.g. listening to uplifting music, enjoying the sunshine What should you avoid when times get tough? e.g. staying in bed all day, avoiding social activities?		



Template 2: Create your self-care plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategy, it's time to write it down.

Your self-care plan can be as simple or complex as you need it to be. You don't need to use this template, you may just prefer a list or diagram.

Here is an example of how your self-care plan might look:

MY DAILY SELF-CARE PLAN					
List your favourite practices for each category					
BODY	MIND	SPIRIT	EMOTIONS	RELATIONSHIPS	WORK

MY TOP THREE POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES
Record three strategies you want to get in the habit of using

MY EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN	
HELPFUL TO-DO	HARMFUL TO AVOID
List your top five emergency practices	List five practices, people, places, or things to avoid during crisis or stress. This will serve as a helpful reminder to keep you on track.

