

# thewisemom

wise: (adj) informed, aware

self-care  
Journaling

health benefits  
of Self Care

happiness is  
an Inside Job





# the health benefits of selfcare

By Donna L. Hamilton, MD, MS, FAAP

**Does this sound familiar:** you make time to take care of everyone else but you “don’t have time” to do something nice for yourself? Occasionally you might manage to eat a balanced meal or workout. Guess what: self-care is as important to your health as nutrition and exercise.

Since being healthy means functioning at your best in all areas of life, it’s important to do things to improve mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being in addition to physical wellness. One way to do this is to choose activities that help you manage stress and feel balanced. Practicing self-care accomplishes this and more. Consciously tending to your personal needs creates wholeness, the essence of health.

Being healthy means more than flat abs and normal cholesterol levels. It also includes healthy thoughts, uplifting emotions, and a supportive life philosophy. Nourishing social circumstances-like reliable friends, a loving family, economic stability, and meaningful activities-also play a key role in living an optimally healthy life.

True self-care, by definition, fosters optimal health. Tending to your personal needs promotes wholeness by giving your mind, body, and spirit what they need or yearn. That's self-care.

Acts of self-care can lead to improved health by 1) doing things that promote health or 2) avoiding things that harm health. For example, eliminating risky activities like distracted driving or tobacco use can boost health and longevity. Similarly, adding healthy activities like meditation or exercise can also improve health and well-being. Both types of choices are self-care.

Self-care also boosts wellness by helping to manage stress. Some experts estimate that stress precipitates up to 85% of health issues. That's not surprising if you consider that many types of stress exist.

Most people talk about distress-the unfavorable or negative interpretation of a real or perceived event. Perhaps that's because distress usually leads to periods of intense emotions like anger or fear. Positive situations, however, can also create stress. This is called eustress. It occurs in situations that inspire or motivate people into action. Falling in love or starting a new business might fall into this category. Both types of stress create demands that require your body to adapt.

Certain acts of self-care can help your body and mind adapt to stressors in a healthy manner. For example, relaxation techniques like diaphragmatic breathing, yoga, or music therapy help calm the nervous system. Mind-Body medicine

experts believe this occurs by causing the body to release relaxation hormones.

Positive coping strategies, also acts of self-care, help alleviate stress by creating a healthy perception about potentially stressful situations. For example, reframing your perspective about an experience can help you view it as an opportunity rather than a threat. Another coping method, journal writing, can transform feelings of overwhelm and confusion into peace and clarity.

Self-care also decreases stress when it's used to create greater personal balance. Choosing to do more of what nourishes you and less of what depletes you creates a sense of balance, confidence, and competence. Doing this for yourself is practicing self-care.

Self-care can fit into any schedule. Even if you don't have the time or financial resources to spend a month alone on a private island, you can still take a few moments to connect with who you really are. Close your eyes and take a deep, conscious breath once an hour. Put on your favorite music and dance like no one is watching. Look in the mirror and complement yourself. Honor yourself every day. You deserve it!

Be well,

*Dr. Donna*



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