Self-Care Starter Kit

Looking after yourself is an important part of living a happy and healthy life. 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 well-being.

Self-care strategies can take many forms. Activities can range from going for a walk to regularly getting a good night's sleep. Establishing a self-care routine will assist you in setting healthy boundaries for your life that promote balance. Though they may seem obvious, these actions are essential to feeling happy, productive and fulfilled at work and in life.

In this Self-Care Starter Kit, you'll learn why self-care matters, why it's important to take time to look after yourself, and how you can practice self care for improved health and quality of life.

Monterey County Employee Wellness Program

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The
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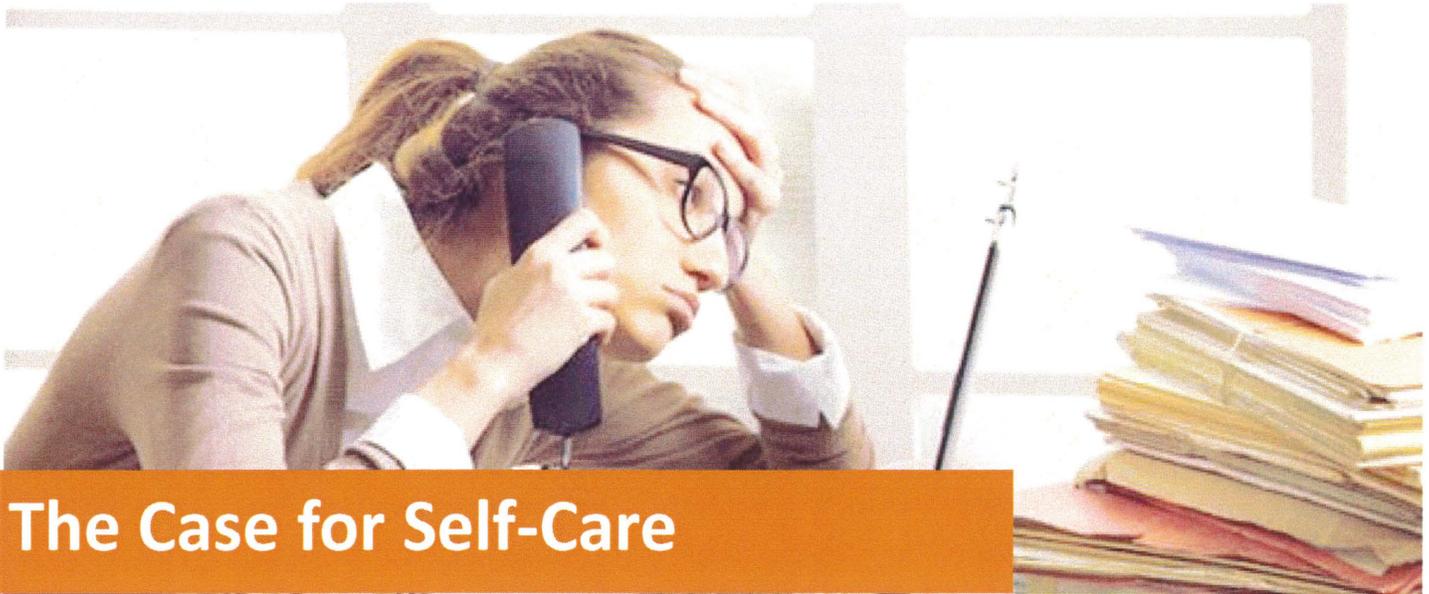
The Case for Self-Care

Life is busy. There are always tasks to do at home, work is busy and can be stressful, your children need your time and energy, and your calendar is jammed. In an effort to keep your schedule under control, sometimes you skip meals, miss your class at the gym, or cancel plans with friends.

When life gets busy, self-care is the first thing we sacrifice. People often think that taking time for themselves in the middle of busy times seems indulgent, but looking after your well-being will help you be productive and care for others.

Self-care helps prevent burnout.

Excessive or prolonged stress can lead to a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, often referred to as burnout. Burnout reduces productivity, zaps your energy, and can lead to physical or mental concerns. 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 burnout.

Self-care helps relationships.

Self-care helps you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself and others. Doing things that make you feel physically and mentally good boosts your confidence and self esteem. When you feel good, you are happier and better able to maintain positive relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. By practicing self-care, you also demonstrate to the people around you that you know how to set healthy, functional boundaries, which sets a great example and also helps to align their expectations of you.

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. Much like refueling the engine of your car, self-care activities refuel your body and mind. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you be more productive and more resilient to stressors.

Building a Self-Care Plan

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

- Deep breathing
- Stretching
- Meditation
- Listening to music
- Exercising
- Reading
- Socializing with friends
- Spending time outdoors
- Engaging in a hobby

Negative

- Yelling
- Arguing
- Overeating
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Skipping meals
- Withdrawing from family and friends

Be honest when evaluating your current behaviors. If you find yourself lashing out or reaching for a cigarette instead of taking a deep breath and refocusing during periods of frustration, it may be time to re-evaluate your go-to coping skills.

Identify Your Self-Care Needs

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? Remember that self-care extends far beyond your basic physical needs: consider your psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and workplace well-being.

You can use the table below to help you determine which areas may need more support.

Area of Self-Care	Helpful (What To Do)	Harmful (What To Avoid)
Relaxation/Staying Calm Which activities help you relax? Which activities make you most agitated or frustrated?		
Self-Talk Helpful self-talk may include "I am safe/I can do this." Harmful elf talk may include "I can't handle this/I knew this would happen."		
Social Support Which family members and friends can you reach out to for help or support? Which people should you avoid in times of stress? Be honest about who helps and who zaps your energy.		
Mood Which activities support a positive mood? Which should you avoid when times get tough?		
Resilience What, or who, helps you get through difficult times? What helps you bounce back? Conversely, what or who feeds negativity for you?		

Reflect: What's working? What isn't? Keep the helpful tools and ditch what's not working for you.

Examine: Are there barriers to maintaining self-care? How can you overcome these barriers so you can incorporate new tools and strategies that will benefit your health and well-being.

Replace: Reduce and eliminate negative coping strategies with positive actions.

Self-Care Activities

- Journal
- Volunteer for a cause meaningful to you
- Make a gratitude list
- Take a fresh air break
- Meditate or listen to guided visualization
- Cuddle with pets
- Treat yourself to a nice meal
- Take a nap
- Listen to music
- Practice yoga
- Go for a nature walk
- Photography
- Read a good book
- Write in a blog
- Try a new hobby
- Have an adventure day
- Get a massage
- Buy yourself flowers
- Turn off electronic devices
- Have a movie marathon
- Play a game
- Dance
- Get a good night's sleep
- Browse your local music store or bookstore
- Join a support group
- Work in the garden
- Get creative: draw, paint or make crafts

To assist you with actively setting intentions for yourself to practice self-care strategies, the Employee Wellness Program has developed "B-WELL Bingo." B-WELL consists of several self-care practices that you as an individual can practice to reduce stress and promote overall wellbeing. You can find the bingo card on the next page. **There is no better time than NOW to begin taking care of our health and well-being, and to make Self-Care a priority.**

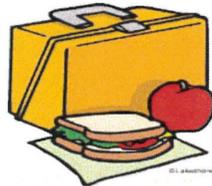| B	W	E	L	L
Use your breaks to relax rather than "pause." Try going for a walk outside or around the office to renew your energy and your focus	Schedule and participate in at least one fun activity that you enjoy	Take quiet time. Reflect and contemplate about your day for 5 minutes in the morning or evening.	Try a new healthy recipe	Participate in your community or volunteer for a cause you care about
Maintain social support. Spend time with others whose company you enjoy	TAKE a stretch BREAK	The Health Promotion Partnership Management, Labor & You EAT HEALTHY BE ACTIVE LIVE WELL	Try setting a specific goal for yourself that will improve your mood and help you reduce stress	Discover the resources available to you through the County's Employee Assistance Program EAP help. when you need it.
Drink 8 glasses of water	Take time for lunch— away from your desk!	List five things you are grateful for. Hang it in a prominent place such as your desk or refrigerator	Practice good sleeping habits. Get 7-8 hours of sleep	Program the Employee Assistance Program's number into your phone: 1-800-531-0200
Process your emotions- Journal about your day	Get moving for at least 30 minutes	Do a kind deed for a friend, coworker or stranger.	Unplug from technology an hour before bed	Notice your inner experience— listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes and feelings
Today	**Today**	**This Week**	**This Week**	**This Month**

Lending Library
Self-Care

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I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't) by Brené Brown, Ph.D. LMSW
Making the journey from "What will people Think?" to "I AM ENOUGH." The quest for perfection is exhausting and unrelenting. We spend too much precious time and energy managing perception and creating carefully edited versions of ourselves to show to the world.

Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff, Ph.D.
The proven power of being kind to yourself. Research indicates that people who are compassionate towards their failings and imperfections experience greater well-being than those who repeatedly judge themselves.

Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana
We already have the foundation needed to live a more mindful, productive, and peaceful life. Author takes us step by step through the myths, realities, and benefits of meditation and the practice of mindfulness.

Well Being The Five Essential Elements by Tom Rath & Jim Harter
By the time you finish reading this book, you'll have a better understanding of what makes life worthwhile. This will enable you to enjoy each day and get more out of your life - while boosting the wellbeing of your friends, family members, colleagues, and others in your community.

On Purpose by Victor J. Stecher, Ph.D
Lessons in life and health from the frog, the dung beetle and Julie. A must read for anyone seeking more depth and meaning in life. Graphic novel format.

Working with Difficult People by Muriel Solomon
Find successful techniques and strategies to use when dealing with even the most difficult office relationships.

How to Keep People From Pushing Your Buttons by Albert Ellis, Ph.D & Arthur Lang, Ed.D
You will find here a set of specific skills you can use to help you react more effectively in the face of potential button-pushers.

People Skills by Robert Bolton. Ph.D.
Learn how to assert yourself, listen to others, and resolve conflicts. These skills that will help you communicate calmly, even in stressful, emotionally charged situations.

Borrow for up to 3 weeks by sending an email with book title and interoffice mail location to 411-HealthPromotion.

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