**What is Self-Care?**

**Self care has been described as the right, and responsibility, to take care of your physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.” (Salvucci, 2001)**

**What might stop you from practicing self-care?**

* **Fear of seeming selfish**
* **Feeling guilty or undeserving**
* **Feeling too busy or overwhelmed to take time for yourself**
* **Feeling awkward or uncertain of what you need**
* **Not knowing the benefits, or not knowing the consequences of neglecting self-care.**

**What are the benefits of self-care?**

* **Self-care helps build your inner resources to help you cope with difficult emotions (this is very important in therapy)**
* **Increases your ability to problem-solve effectively**
* **It builds your capacity to care for others (for example, children or other people in your life)**
* **It improves your physical and psychological health and well-being**
* **Improves your quality of life**
* **Strengthens your immune system**
* **It helps you feel that you deserve to be cared for**

**What are the consequences of neglecting self-care?**

* **Inability to concentrate or think clearly**
* **Emotional ups and downs**
	+ **Anxiety, feeling depressed, irritability**
	+ **Anger and resentment towards others**
* **Physical discomfort**
	+ **Muscle tension, aches & pains**
	+ **Headaches**
* **Difficulty sleeping, nightmares.**
* **Prone to illnesses like cold or flu**

**Examples of Self-Care**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **7-8 hours of sleep a night** | **Quiet time** | **Hot shower or relaxing bath** |
| **Eating healthy** | **Connecting with good friends** | **Taking a nap** |
| **Exercise** | **Expressing your feelings** | **Enjoying nature** |
| **Drinking a lot of water** | **Taking time for hobbies** | **Saying ‘no’ sometimes** |
| **Breathing exercises** | **Fresh air** | **Humor and laughter** |
| **Journaling** | **Counselling** | **Treating yourself** |
| **Meditation / Guided imagery** | **Practicing spirituality** | **Asking for help** |

**Homework: Choose one activity above and commit to practicing it as often as possible this week.**

**Adapted from http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca/docs/sft-self-care-plan.pdf**

**Diaphragmatic Breathing**

**Benefits of Diaphragmatic Breathing:**

**Triggers relaxation response, facilitates grounding and centering in the moment (necessary for decreasing anxiety), promotes circulation throughout body (including the brain, which requires oxygenated blood in order to process thoughts & feelings), connects you to your body where you can gain awareness of your emotional state.**

**Diaphragmatic breathing technique**

**1.** Lie on your back on a flat surface  or in bed, with your knees bent and your head supported. You can use a pillow under your knees  to support your legs. Place one hand on your  upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.

**2.** Breathe in slowly through your nose so that **your stomach moves out against your hand.**

**The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.**

**3.** Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through your lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

**To perform this exercise while sitting in a chair:**

**1.** Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.

**2.** Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.

**3.** As you breathe in, feel your belly push out against your hand. As you breathe out, tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through your mouth. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Note: You may notice an increased effort will be needed to use the diaphragm correctly. At first, you'll probably get tired while doing this exercise. But keep at it, because with continued practice, diaphragmatic breathing will become easy and automatic.

##### How often should I practice this exercise?

At first, practice this exercise 5-10 minutes about 3-4 times per day. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend doing this exercise, and perhaps even increase the effort of the exercise by placing a book on your abdomen.

Adapted from http://www.cchs.net/health/health-info/docs/2400/2409.asp?index=9445

**Relaxing 'Safe Place' Imagery**

* Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe.  It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamt about going to, or maybe somewhere you've seen a picture of.
* Focus on the colours in your peaceful safe place.
* Now notice the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence.
* Think about any smells you notice there.
* Then focus on any skin sensations - the earth beneath you, the temperature, and any movement of air, anything else you can touch.
* Now whilst you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
* You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now.

Reprinted from <http://www.get.gg/imagery.htm>

**Grounding & Relaxation Techniques**

* Breathe deeply from your diaphragm – notice how your breath feels going in and out.
* Feel your feet on the ground… rock them back and forth and feel the pressure on the soles of your feet.
* Focus on your senses… list 5 things you can see, 5 things you can hear, 5 things you can smell, 5 things you can taste, 5 things you can feel.
* Reorient yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:
	+ 1. Where am I?
	+ 2. What is today?
	+ 3. What is the date?
	+ 4. What is the month?
	+ 5. What is the year?
	+ 6. How old am I?
	+ 7. What season is it?

Adapted from <http://www.peirsac.org/peirsacui/er/educational_resources10.pdf>

**Grounding Techniques**

Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. They help reorient a person to the here-and-now and in reality. Grounding skills can be helpful in a variety of situations: with \*dissociation symptoms; and managing overwhelming feelings or intense anxiety. They help someone to regain their mental focus from an often intensely emotional state. (\*Dissociation is a mental process, which produces a lack of connection in a person’s thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. Dissociation can manifest in a variety of ways: highway hypnosis, “spacing out”, numbing, “losing touch” on a conscious level with our immediate surroundings or as chronic dissociation as in cases of Dissociative Disorders which can result in severe impairment or inability to function.

(Source: Sidran Institute: Traumatic Stress Education and Advocacy website: [www.sidran.org](http://www.sidran.org))

**Grounding skills occur within two specific approaches:**

1) Sensory Awareness

2) Cognitive Awareness

**Sensory Awareness Grounding Exercise #1:**

Begin by tracing your hand on a piece of paper and label each finger as one of the five senses. Then take each finger and identify something special and safe representing each of those five senses. For example: Thumb represents sight and a label for sight might be butterflies or my middle finger represents the smell sense and it could be represented by lilacs. After writing and drawing all this on paper, post it on your refrigerator or other safe places in the home where it could be easily seen and memorize it. Whenever you get triggered, breathe deeply and slowly, and put your hand in front of your face where you can really see it – stare at your hand and then look at each finger and try to do the five senses exercise from memory. Source: [www.stardrift.net/survivor/senses.html](http://www.stardrift.net/survivor/senses.html)

**Sensory Awareness Grounding Exercise #2:**

• Keep your eyes open, look around the room, and notice your surroundings, notice details.

• Hold a pillow, stuffed animal or a ball.

• Place a cool cloth on your face, or hold something cool such as a can of soda.

• Listen to soothing music

• Put your feet firmly on the ground

• FOCUS on someone’s voice or a neutral conversation.

**Sensory Awareness Grounding Exercise #3:**

Here’s the 54321 “game”.

• Name 5 things you can see in the room with you.

• Name 4 things you can feel (“chair on my back” or “feet on floor”)

• Name 3 things you can hear right now (“fingers tapping on keyboard” or “tv”)

• Name 2 things you can smell right now (or, 2 things you like the smell of)

• Name 1 good thing about yourself

(Source: www.ibiblio.org/rcip//copingskills.html)

**Cognitive Awareness Grounding Exercise:**

Reorient yourself in place and time by asking yourself some or all of these questions:

1. Where am I?

2. What is today?

3. What is the date?

4. What is the month?

5. What is the year?

6. How old am I?

7. What season is it?

Reprinted from <http://www.peirsac.org/peirsacui/er/educational_resources10.pdf>

**The Health Benefits of Journaling**

Research supports the notion that journaling has both physical and psychological benefits. The act of writing accesses your left brain, which is analytical and rational. While your left brain is occupied, your right brain is free to create, intuit and feel. In sum, writing removes mental blocks and allows you to use all of your brainpower to better understand yourself, others and the world around you. Begin journaling and begin experiencing these benefits:

* **Clarify your thoughts and feelings.** Do you ever seem all jumbled up inside, unsure of what you want or feel? Taking a few minutes to jot down your thoughts and emotions (no editing!) will quickly get you in touch with your internal world.
* **Know yourself better.** By writing routinely you will get to know what makes you feel happy and confident. You will also become clear about situations and people who are toxic for you — important information for your emotional well-being.
* **Reduce stress.** Writing about anger, sadness and other painful emotions helps to release the intensity of these feelings. By doing so you will feel calmer and better able to cope with stress in the moment.
* **Solve problems more effectively.** Typically we problem solve from a left-brained, analytical perspective. But sometimes the answer can only be found by engaging right-brained creativity and intuition. Writing unlocks these other capabilities, and affords the opportunity for unexpected solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems.
* **Resolve disagreements with others.** Writing about misunderstandings rather than stewing over them will help you to understand another’s point of view, and to lessen the intensity of your own emotions. And you just may come up with a sensible resolution to the conflict.

In addition to all of these wonderful benefits, keeping a journal allows you **to track patterns, trends and improvement and growth over time**. When current circumstances appear insurmountable, you will be able to look back on previous dilemmas that you have since resolved.

**How to Begin**

Your journaling will be most effective if you:

* **Do it daily for about 20 minutes.**
* Begin anywhere, and forget spelling and punctuation.
* Privacy is key if you are to write without censor.
* Write quickly, as this frees your brain from “shoulds” and other blocks to successful journaling.
* If it helps, pick a theme for the day, week or month (for example, peace of mind, confusion, change or anger).
* The most important rule of all is that there are no rules.

Through your writing you’ll discover that your journal is an all-accepting, nonjudgmental friend, and may be the cheapest form of therapy. Best of luck on your journaling journey!

Adapted from http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/the-health-benefits-of-journaling/

**Body Scan Meditation**

When you're feeling stressed, it's common to carry stress in your body in the form of tense shoulders, a stomach 'in knots', through shallow breathing, or in other ways. When people carry stress in their bodies, they're often not even aware of it! When we're really stressed, we may be feeling physical discomfort but not connect it with our emotions. A body scan meditation is a practice that can be performed daily or even several times a day, and can help you learn to identify what you are feeling and where you're feeling it, and learn to release the stress in your body and mind. Try a body scan meditation right now!

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** A Few Minutes

**Here's How:**

1. Sit in a comfortable place and fully relax your body. Let your breathing slow down, and start breathing from your belly instead of from your chest.
2. Starting with your head, notice any tension you're feeling as you practice your body scan meditation. Do you feel a feeling of tightness anywhere? Pain? A feeling of concentrated 'energy' around a certain area? Sit with it for a minute and notice what you're feeling.
3. If you notice any uncomfortable sensations, focus on them. Breathe into them, and notice what happens. (Many people notice that the feeling becomes more intense first, and as they continue their body scan meditation and keep their focus, the feeling dissipates.) Keep your awareness on that feeling for a little while, just staying present. Give yourself a little massage in that area if you want to.
4. Next, move down to your neck, and repeat these body scan meditation steps. Notice if there's any tightness, pain or pressure. Breathe into the areas you notice, and stay with the feelings. Gently massage your neck if you wish. Let the energy relax.
5. Continue this practice with each area of your body, moving from head to toe. Notice how you feel, where you're holding your stress, and what sensations you're experiencing as a result. Breathe, meditate, massage and relax. This can help you release tension in your body now, and be more aware of it in the future so you can release it then, too.

**Tips:**

1. Practice this body scan meditation any time you feel stress, or several times through the day.
2. If you don't have a lot of time, you can do an abbreviated version of this body scan meditation by just sitting and noticing any place in your body that you're carrying tension, rather than moving group by group. This will become easier as you practice the body scan meditation regularly.
3. The body scan meditation can promote body awareness, stress awareness, and relaxation. Practice it often.

Adapted from http://stress.about.com/od/meditation/ht/body\_scan\_meditation.htm

**Using Mindfulness to Cope with Difficult Emotions – “Ride Out the Emotion”**

**Emotions have three components:**

1. The thoughts, or “the story”
2. Physical sensations or how the emotion manifests in the body; for example, an ache in your heart.
3. Emotional mood or tone in the mind; for example, a lightness or openness when you feel joy.

Emotions need to be experienced, but staying with “the story” of the emotion, fuels the emotion. It doesn’t allow the emotion to be fully experienced. If you turn your attention to the emotion itself, to the sensations it produces in the body, and the effect it has on the mind, the emotion has a chance to flow through us in a natural way. It will naturally wind itself out, like a breath flowing out.

**Practicing Mindfulness with Emotions – R.A.I.N.**

**R – RECOGNIZE when a strong emotion is present.**

There is power in recognizing and naming the emotion. Sometimes it is clear what we are experiencing, and it is easy to name: anger, happiness, loneliness, or fear. When we clearly name the emotion, the part of our mind that ‘recognizes’ and ‘knows’ is strengthened. We strengthen our capacity for non-reactivity. Sometimes it is not clear what emotion we are experiencing, and it may feel like a mixture of emotions. Instead of analyzing or figuring it out, it’s helpful to simply name it “emotion,” or “confusion,” or even “chaos.”

**A – ACCEPT and acknowledge the emotion.**

Know that any emotion is OK. Give yourself permission to have any emotion at all; there is no need to censor or judge your emotions. Sometimes it can be unpleasant to be with difficult emotions like anger. With acceptance, the emotion and the unpleasantness will pass through you, and eventually will fade and disappear.

**I – INVESTIGATE your experience.**

Take an interest in exploring the emotion. How do you know you are feeling that emotion? What else tells you that this is happiness, or anger? The best place to start is in the body – explore what you are feeling in all parts of your body as you have this emotion. Bringing attention to the physical sensations is one of the best ways to let go of the story, and bring yourself into the moment.

**N – NON-IDENTIFICATION**

Be curious about your experience, without getting swept away by the story. Consider that the emotion is a passing visitor in your body, and not the definition of who you are.

Adapted from http://ordinarymindfulness.blogspot.com/2011/09/rain.html

**Eating for Mental Health**

Dietary changes can bring about changes in our brain structure (chemically and physiologically), which can lead to altered mood and behavior. The following is a list of foods and dietary practices to help regulate mood and sustain energy levels. This list is meant to be suggestive only, and should not replace the advice or recommendations of a medical professional.

**Mealtimes**

Eat small regular meals throughout the day to keep your blood sugar from rising and falling more than necessary. Five small meals are better than two or three huge meals. Choose foods that release energy slowly, like meat, fish, and whole grains. Avoid eating late at night and less than two hours before bed.

**Water**

The most vital substance for a healthy mind and body is water. It's easy to overlook drinking the recommended six to eight glasses, per day, which is a low-cost, convenient, self-help measure that can quickly change how we feel, mentally as well as physically.

**Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**

Having a minimum of five portions, daily, of fresh fruit and vegetables (organically grown, if possible) provides the nutrients needed to nourish mind and body. (One portion equals about a handful.)

**Protein**

It's also important to eat some protein foods, such as meat, fish, beans, eggs, cheese, nuts or seeds, every day. As well as providing nutrients, these eating strategies help smooth the negative effects of fluctuating blood sugar levels, which include irritability, poor concentration, fatigue, depression, and food cravings.

Essential fatty acids, particularly the omega-3 type found in oil-rich fish, such as mackerel and sardines, linseeds (flax), hemp seeds and their oils, are vital for the formation and healthy functioning of the brain. Other seeds and nuts, such as sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, brazil nuts and walnuts, also contain important 'good mood' nutrients.

**Grains**

Whole grains like oats (ex. oatmeal), corn, brown rice, barley, rye.

**Foods to avoid or limit:**

* Refined sugar (desserts, candy, cakes)
* Sugary drinks (like pop or lemonade)
* bleached flours (found in white bread or buns, cookies, pastries, etc.)
* Fatty foods
* Alcohol
* Caffeine
* Dairy (in moderation)
* Processed foods (Often high in fat or sugars/carbohydrates, and boxed or packaged, and preserved with chemicals)

Adapted from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prescriptions-life/200907/how-food-can-improve-your-mood-delicious-ways-prevent-depression>

**Effect of Exercise on Mental Health**

 As a result of exercise, the body releases different chemicals that affect the brain. One group of chemicals is called *endorphins*. During exercise, the release of the beta-endorphin by the pituitary gland increases and produces an analgesic effect on the body as well as a feeling of elation or euphoria.

Some longer-lasting effects of exercise on the brain are:

* decreased anxiety
* reduced depression
* improved ability to cope with stress
* raised self-esteem
* improved mood
* improved sleep
* increased ability to think, reason, and remember

 With exercise, several biological changes occur that make nerve cells more active or increase the ability of neurons to communicate with one another. The way this works is that the exercise fuels the body with blood, which carries energy and oxygen to the brain, which in turn tells the body to produce more proteins called neurotrophic factors or growth factors. These substances stimulate nerve cells to grow and connect with one another (neuroplasticity) or to develop new nerve cells (neurogenesis).

 The hippocampus, a seahorse-shaped region in the temporal lobe of the brain, is involved in regulating mood and storing memories. Studies have shown that exercise caused an increase in the production of important proteins in the hippocampus. These two proteins promote nerve growth and survival, and are like “fertilizers” for the brain. The release of other chemicals such as serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, melatonin, and insulin are also affected by exercise, which in turn can affect mental and emotional health.

|  |
| --- |
| Examples of Exercise:Brisk walking Gardening Dancing Yoga / Pilates Running/Jogging Team sports Bicycling Swimming Golf Exercise class Mowing the lawn Hiking Martial Arts/Self-defense |
| Choose an activity: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_How often will you do it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Where? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_With who? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |

Adapted from: <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/frame_found_gr11/rm/module_c_lesson_1.pdf>