



Seven Types of Self-Care Activities for Coping with Stress

When we're stressed, self-care is often the first thing to go. Why is this?

1. Our brains go into fight-or-flight mode and our perspective narrows. We don't see we have options—options for coping with stress and making ourselves feel better.
2. We're so busy trying to solve problems that we're stuck in "doing mode"—trying to get more and more done—when switching to "being mode" may be just the break we need.
3. We may not have a "go-to" list of self-care activities. Self-care has to become a habit so that when we're dealing with stress, we remember that, "Hey, I need to take care of myself in this situation." And, you need a variety of activities to try—if one doesn't work, you can switch to another.

Fortunately, there are several pathways to self-care, and none of them need to be difficult or take a lot of planning.

Sensory

When you feel stressed and need a calm mind, try focusing on the sensations around you—sights, smells, sounds, tastes, touch. This will help you focus on the present moment, giving you a break from your worries.

- Breathe in fresh air.
- Snuggle under a cozy blanket.
- Listen to running water.
- Sit outdoors by a fire pit, watching the flames and listening to the night sounds.
- Take a hot shower or a warm bath.
- Get a massage.
- Cuddle with a pet.
- Pay attention to your breathing.
- Burn a scented candle.
- Wiggle your bare feet in overgrown grass.
- Stare up at the sky.
- Lie down where the afternoon sun streams in a window.
- Listen to music.

Pleasure

A great way to take care of yourself when you're coping with stress is to engage in a pleasurable activity. Try one of these ideas.

- Take yourself out to eat.
- Be a tourist in your own city.
- Garden.
- Watch a movie.
- Make art. Do a craft project.
- Journal.
- Walk your dogs.
- Go for a photo walk.
- Mental/Mastery

- You can also give yourself a boost by doing a task that you've been avoiding or challenging your brain in a novel way. This can also boost self-confidence.
- Clean out a junk drawer or a closet.
- Take action (one small step) on something you've been avoiding.
- Try a new activity.
- Drive to a new place.
- Make a list.
- Immerse yourself in a crossword puzzle.
- Do a word search.
- Read something on a topic you wouldn't normally.

Spiritual

Getting in touch with your values—what really matters—is a sure way to cope with stress and foster a calm mind. Activities that people define as spiritual are very personal. Here are a few ideas.

- Attend church or spiritual ceremony of your choice.
- Read poetry or inspiring quotes.
- Light a candle.
- Meditate.
- Write in a journal.
- Spend time in nature.
- Pray or be mindful in your spiritual way.
- List five things you're grateful for.

Emotional

Dealing with our emotions can be challenging when we're coping with stress. We tend to label emotions as "good" or "bad," but this isn't helpful. Instead:

- Accept your feelings. They're all OK. Really.
- Write your feelings down. Here's a list of feeling words.
- Cry when you need to.
- Laugh when you can. (Try laughter yoga.)
- Practice self-compassion.

Physical

Coping with stress by engaging the body is great because you can bypass a lot of unhelpful mental chatter. It's hard to feel stressed when you're doing one of the following self-care activities.

- Try yoga.
- Go for a walk or a run.
- Dance.
- Stretch.
- Go for a bike ride.
- Don't skip sleep to get things done.
- Take a nap.
- Social
- Connecting with others is an important part of self-care. This can mean activities such as:
 - Go on a lunch date with a good friend.
 - Calling a friend on the phone.

- Participating in a book club.
- Joining a support group.

It can also mean remembering that others go through similar experiences and difficulties as we do.

We're not alone.

Simply acknowledging that we're all part of this human experience can lessen isolation and lead to a calm mind. That's the best self-care strategy I know.



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