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# SELF CARE WORKBOOK

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*For You*



Self-care is the practice of protecting one's well-being and happiness - particularly during times of stress. It is when you consciously take care of yourself so that you can be healthy, be at peace and do all the things that you have always wished to do.



It is an integral part of maintaining your overall well-being. It involves taking care of your physical, mental, and emotional needs and finding ways to relax and unwind. There are many different self-care strategies that you can use, such as getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, practicing mindfulness, and engaging in activities that bring you joy. It's also essential to seek support, whether talking to a loved one, seeing a therapist, or joining a support group.

By regularly incorporating self-care into your routine and seeking support when needed, you can help to maintain your overall well-being and feel more balanced and fulfilled.

Love  
Yourself



# WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care is the practice of protecting one's well-being and happiness - particularly during times of stress. It is when we consciously take care of ourselves so that we can be healthy, be at peace and do all the things that we have always wished to do.

Self-care is like a bank account. If you withdraw more than you deposit, you'll overdraw your account and the bank will charge you a hefty fee. The same is true for people. If you're constantly withdrawing your time and energy, but not replenishing it, it will eventually catch up with you and there will be a big price to pay

- Sharon Martin, LCSW

Self-care is any practice that helps us reduce stress, replenish our well-ness resources and maintain or improve our long-term health. There are two types of self-care: maintenance and emergency.

## Maintenance Self-care

These can be categorized as what we do every-day to help ourselves, such as the long run, exercise, drinking water, practicing basic hygiene and moving.

## Emergency Self-care

These are the activities we do when we feel stressed, burnt out or overwhelmed. Activities included in emergency self-care can include deep breathing, coloring or calling someone who helps calm us down.

# STEP ONE

## IDENTIFY YOUR SYMPTOMS

A good first step in the self-care journey is to identify when we are stressed. What are the symptoms that usually arise?

Check all the boxes that apply to you. Feel free to add any additional symptoms that you experience, that are not specifically mentioned below

### Physical Symptoms

- Upset stomach
- Trouble sleeping / Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Tight chest / throat
- Backpain
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches
- Exhaustion
- Cold / sickness

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### Mental Symptoms

- Trouble focusing
- Difficulty making decisions
- Forgetfulness
- Frequent errors
- Drop in performance (either at work or at school)
- Disconnected from, or not interested in, everyday activities

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### Emotional Symptoms

- Angry, irritable
- Overwhelmed / overburdened
- Feeling impatient
- Feeling hopeless
- No joy or enjoyment
- Worried / stressed
- Feeling neglected or lonely
- Your thoughts are racing and you cannot switch off

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### Behavioral Symptoms

- Poor eating habits
- Drug usage
- Preferring to be alone
- Working too much
- Critical (of self / others)
- Binge-watching TV
- Spending an excessive amount of time on social media

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# STEP TWO

## IDENTIFY YOUR STRESSORS

Simply speaking, a “stressor” is any real or imagined situation or, event that is perceived as a threat, or which causes stress. It is the stressor(s) that produce the symptoms of stress identified above.

Think for a minute and identify three (03) stressors that you are currently experiencing in your life. These could include financial stressors, academics, changing relationships, health issues, etc.

Write each stressor onto the Stress Thermometer displayed below. The higher the stressor, the more stress symptoms you are facing.

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**So stressed I could explode!**

# STEP THREE

## ASSESS YOUR COPING SKILLS

“Coping mechanisms” are those strategies that we consciously use in order to face stress / trauma and face (or get rid of) painful or unpleasant emotions (including stressors). Different people have different methods of coping with their stress and pain, with some methods being more helpful than others. Take a moment to assess how you deal with stress / unpleasant or painful emotions?

### Counter-productive Coping Mechanisms

These are behaviors that may be providing you temporary relief, but, if used continuously, they will add to your stress(s) and create more problems over time. Some examples are given below - mark which ones suit you best.

- Venting or complaining to friends / family
- Procrastination
- Numbing stress with alcohol or drugs or work
- Unhealthy eating habit (either restricting food intake or eating more than your body needs / wants)
- Scrolling mindlessly on social media / Binging TV

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## Healthy (Positive) Coping Mechanisms

These are behaviors that actively lower your level of stress through changing your perception of the stressors. Some examples are given below - mark which ones suit you best.

- Asking for help / tapping into your support system
- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Affirmations
- Journaling
- Setting strong boundaries
- Practising self-reflection and mindfulness
- Checking in with yourself a few times a day

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# STEP FOUR

## STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS

We can take direct approaches to coping with stressors. We can either avoid, alter, accept or adapt to a stressor.

1.

### AVOID

Which stressors can you limit in your life? Are there toxic situations or environments to which you can limit exposure? What can you say “no” to in your life?

2.

### ALTER

Where you cannot avoid the stress, what can you change to decrease its affect on your?

3.

## ACCEPT

Can you shift how you spend your time and energy, and put it into things you can change, instead of things you can't?

What can you learn from your stressors?

4.

## ADAPT

Look again at your list of stressors. Can you change your perspective about any of them? Can you set more realistic expectations?

Take a look at all the stressors you added next to the Stress Thermometer on page 04. Identify if you will avoid, alter, accept or adapt each stressor.

Once you have identified how you will react to each stressor, write how you will cope with it.

Stressor	Reaction to stressor	Coping Mechanism

# STEP FIVE

## EXPLORING HEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS

Reforming your thoughts regarding stress has numerous benefits, including increasing life expectancy, decreasing depression, and / or heightening your confidence; allowing you to successfully cope with all the challenges that life throws at you.

Go back to look at the stressors you noted down on page 04 and try to understand their effect(s) on you. Take moment to challenge your perceptions and identify if some of the stressors can help you to grow and learn. For example, the stress before finals / exams helps you to focus and study.

Using the growth mindset, try to reframe your perception with respect to three (03) stressors that you mentioned earlier.

### What is a growth mindset?

A growth mindset means believing that a person's abilities are not innate, but can be improved through effort, learning and persistence. It is all about the attitude with which a person faces life's challenges, how they process failures and how they adapt and evolve.

Stressor

Changed perception using  
the growth mindset

# STEP SIX

## PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness refers to a type of meditation in which you are intensely aware of what you are doing and / or feeling at that point in time; without interpretation or judgement. It is the practice of being present and fully engaged with whatever you are doing in that moment. This technique has been proven to reduce stress.

There are numerous methods of practicing mindfulness.

### Self-Soothing Technique for Anxiety

1. To yourself, name five (05) things that you see in front of you.
2. Identify four (04) colours that you see.
3. Describe three (03) sensations that your body is feeling right now.
4. This could include high temperature, the texture of your shirt, or even the feeling of your bare feet on the ground / grass.
5. Name two sounds that you can hear.
6. State one (01) scent that you can smell .

There are several types of breathing exercises that you may find useful in dealing with stress. These exercises will allow you to feel calmer and more relaxed. All you need is a quiet place and somewhere to sit. Make sure your bare feet touch the ground which you are doing these breathing exercises.

Start doing breathing exercises for just five (05) minutes each day. Slowly increase the time spent with each breathing exercise as you begin to feel more comfortable with the exercises.

Practice multiple times a day. Schedule specific times to practice. Alternatively, you could also simply practice conscious breathing.



Breathing exercises do not have to take too much of your time.

Just spend some time during your day to step away from responsibilities and simply focus on your breathing for a few minutes during the day.

Square breathing is a type of breathwork that can shift your energy, help you connect with your body at a deeper level, it can calm your nervous system and reduce stress.

Some other names that it is commonly known by are “box breathing”, “4 x 4 breathing” and “4-part breathing technique”.

The set up for square breathing is easy to create. It is usually a good idea to sit in a chair, with your back supported and completely straight. Keep your bare feet on the ground. Really feel the support of the chair and the floor under you.

Alternatively, you could also sit in a seated meditation position, or lie down on the ground. The important thing to focus on is that your body is open to allow breath to flow freely through you.

1. Set an Intention: You might want to focus on a neutral mental image during your breathing; or simply set an intention for “relaxation” or “healing”, etc.

2. How to do Square Breathing: Follow these steps:

- Begin by slowly exhaling all of the air out of your lungs.
- Then, gently inhale through your nose to the slow count of four (04).
- Hold your breath to the slow count of four (04).
- Then, gently exhale through your mouth to the slow count of four (04).
- At the bottom of the breath, pause and hold it for the count of four (04).



3. When to use the Square Breathing technique: This technique can be used in various situations, include:

- When you need to calm down when feeling overwhelmed
- Before you respond to a high stress situation
- When trying to sleep
- To reduce work stress
- To reset your creative juices
- When you need to clear your head
- In a meeting at work
- When setting your intentions for the day
- When making a big decision

4. Where to Practice Square Breathing: The best thing about practicing (any type of) breathwork is that you can do it anywhere - even while on the move! You do not require any special tools, such as a yoga kit or scented candles, etc. You can practice breathwork on your way to work, in meetings or during a stressful moment with your partner.

You can also use it when you are not in high stress situations. This extra practice will make it a familiar resource that you can rely on during moments of high stress.

Try to take a few minutes out of your day, every day, to practice square breathing. You could also make use of a journal or diary to keep track of the changes your body experiences over each passing day. Allow the breathing exercises you learn to help you focus and to release stress, allowing your body to relax and find new meaning in the work you do.

# STEP SEVEN

## IDENTIFY YOUR NEXT STEPS

Take a moment to reflect on everything that you have learned so far.

Based on your identified symptoms of stress, and on your exploring new and healthy coping mechanisms, what are your next steps / goals for preventing and / or managing your stress?

Additionally, what is the one self-care practice tip that you can start implementing each day from now onwards?

Identify three (03) action steps that you can take to prevent / manage your stress

1.

2.

3.

# STEP EIGHT

## CREATE AN EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN

Utilizing the resources and coping mechanism that you have learned so far, complete the table below to create a plan for effectively responding to your stressors, while also maintaining your self-care routine when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. An example has already been provided for your ease.

Stressor	I will:	By:
Racing thoughts .....	Practice mindfulness .....	Take deep breaths to the count of four .....

# STEP NINE

## COMMIT TO A SELF-CARE PLAN

Fill out the self-care plan table given below. Keep it some place where you can see it often. If you are living with family / friends, inform the people you live with that you will be taking action for self-care routinely and that they respect your boundaries.

### My Self-Care Plan

#### Self-Care Ideas For The Week

Love  
Yourself

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*Pakistan's Digital Domestic Violence Resource Centre*

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