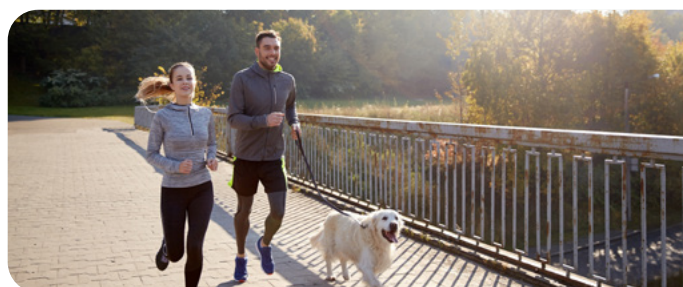# Self-care planning for healthcare workers

COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing resources

What the fact sheet covers:

- Self-care explained
- Creating a self-care plan
- Personal planning templates

As a healthcare worker, we are used to looking out for the health and wellbeing of others. In the midst of caring for others, we often overlook our own needs. Sometimes the last person we care for is ourself.

Self-care is often the first thing that gets sacrificed when life is busy and stressful. You may think that taking time for yourself seems indulgent. But self-care is not just about soothing activities; it's about creating a plan that will help you focus, make decisions and stay healthy.

A self-care plan will identify what nourishes and sustains you, to help you get through the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and better care for others.

Remember, if you don't look after yourself first you won't be able to help your patients or the other important people in your life.

What is self-care?

Self-care refers to the activities that we deliberately choose to engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing.

Self-care helps to prevent stress and anxiety

By incorporating self-care activities into your regular routine, like taking a walk or socialising with friends, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset and rejuvenate, so you can reduce or prevent the symptoms of stress and anxiety.

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 – however unusual they might be at present. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you to be more resilient and productive.

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How to create a self-care plan

Step 1 | Evaluate your coping skills

Examining your own habits is an important first step in developing a self-care plan.

When faced with increased demands, we can use either positive or negative coping strategies. Below are a few examples of each.

Which strategies do you use?

Positive
Slow breathing
Listening to music
Exercising
Mindfulness or meditation
Reading for pleasure
Connecting with others
Engaging in a hobby

Negative
Snapping or lashing out at others
Smoking
Working through breaks
Skipping meals
Drinking alcohol to excess
Withdrawal from friends and family
Bottling emotions up

It's important to be honest when evaluating your behaviours. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or angry, snappy with others, or unable to switch off the worries, it may be time to re-evaluate your coping skills.

Step 2 | Identify your daily self-care needs

Take a moment to consider what you value and need in your everyday life. Then consider what you value and need during these difficult times.

Remember that self-care extends beyond your basic physical needs. Consider also your emotional, spiritual, social, financial, and workplace wellbeing.

You will find a template for 'Identifying needs' at the end of this fact sheet, with examples to get you started.

Step 3 | Reflect. Examine. Replace.

Reflect

Reflect on your existing coping strategies. What's working? What isn't working?

Examine

Are there barriers to maintaining your self-care? Are there any small steps you can take to address these? Do you need to ask others for assistance?

Replace

Work towards reducing, and then eliminating, negative coping strategies. If you find yourself using negative strategies, then begin by choosing one action you feel is most harmful

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and identify a positive strategy to replace it.negative strategies, then begin by choosing one action you feel is most harmful and identify a positive strategy to replace it.

Step 4 | Create your Self-care plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategies, write them down. Your self-care plan can be as simple or as detailed as you need it to be.

Look at it regularly, keep going back to it and refining it as the COVID-19 situation changes.

You will find a template for your 'Personal Self-Care Plan' at the end of this fact sheet that you can print and fill in.

We will continue to provide updates and resources on blackdoginstitute.org.au/covid-19 to assist with the changing COVID-19 situation.

For more information

Visit our website blackdoginstitute.org.au
Find us on social media @blackdoginst

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Template 1: Identifying needs

Daily self-care

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?

Use the table below to help you determine which areas may need more support.

Area of self-care	Current practices	Practices to try
Physical *e.g.* eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups		
Emotional *e.g.* engage in positive or rewarding activities, acknowledge your own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way		
Spiritual *e.g.* read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, prayer		
Professional *e.g.* pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, foster positive relationships with co-workers, take breaks		
Social *e.g.* healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends		
Financial *e.g.* understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, make a plan to pay off debt		
Psychological *e.g.* take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, learn new skills, access psychotherapy or counselling support through your EAP if needed		

Template 1: Identifying needs

Emergency self-care

When you are faced with a crisis, you probably won't have time to create a coping strategy. Take time to develop a plan in advance so it's there when you need it. Try completing the following table to help identify your unique self-care needs during times of stress.

Emergency self-care strategies	Helpful	Unhelpful
Relaxation and staying calm Which activities help you to relax? *e.g.* slow breathing, taking a walk Which activities make you more agitated or frustrated? *e.g.* yelling, swearing, or drinking		
Self-Talk Helpful self-talk may include, "I am safe/I can do this/I managed OK last time." Harmful self-talk may include, "I can't handle this/I deserve this/I'm not good enough."		
Social support Which family members and friends can you reach out to for help or support? Which people should you avoid during times of stress? Be honest about who helps and who drains your energy.		
Mood Which activities support a positive mood? *e.g.* listening to uplifting music, exercising, enjoying the sunshine What should you avoid when things get tough? *e.g.* staying in bed all day, avoiding social activities.		

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Template 2: Create your self-care plan

Once you've determined your personal needs and strategies, it's time to write it down.

Your self-care plan can be as simple or complex as you need it to be. You don't need to use this template, you may just prefer to create your own list or diagram.

Here is an example of how your self-care plan might look:

MY DAILY SELF-CARE PLAN
List your favourite practices for each category

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	SPIRITUAL	PROFESSIONAL	SOCIAL	FINANCIAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL

MY TOP THREE POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES
Record three strategies you want to get in the habit of using regularly

MY EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN

| HELPFUL | TO-DO
List your top three emergency practices | HARMFUL | TO AVOID
List three practices, people, places, or things to avoid during crisis or stress. This will serve as a helpful reminder to keep you on track. |
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