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151 Self Care ideas to increase mindfulness and avoid burnout

Rachelle September 3, 2017 [Blog](#), [Counselling](#), [Self-Care](#)

151 Self Care ideas to increase mindfulness and avoid burnout

The best self-care ideas are self-care activities that resonate with you on a personal level. The best way to come up with a complete self care plan is to make a list of all the things you enjoy doing best for self care. However, many of us have forgotten what it is like to take care of yourself first.

- [How to use these self care ideas](#)

Impatient to get started on self-care right away?

- [Skip straight to the list of 151 Self Care Ideas](#)

You are your first responsibility. If you were responsible for a baby, you would (hopefully) never neglect the baby, right? Well, it is time to start thinking about yourself the same way!



Another important thing to bear in mind with self-care ideas is that there are some elements of self care that are daily activities and maintenance whereas others are ways to take care of yourself that are more fun or decadent. They are equally important. The most important elements of daily self care are discussed here in [“How to Take Care of Yourself From the Inside Out”](#).

Who are self-care ideas for?

These are self-care ideas for people who are, for the most part, mentally well. Although some of these self-care ideas will work for you if you are suffering from anxiety or depression or some other condition, you may not be ready for these ideas if you are unwell. I have written a [depression treatment plan](#) to help people guide themselves through depression (which is definitely not a substitute for seeking help in the form of counselling or a physician).

These self-care ideas are necessary because many of us tend to live life at such a frantic pace, overscheduling ourselves. People, perhaps especially those in the behavioural health field, but others as well, can tend to get burnt out. The way to avoid burn out is self-care. However, “self-care activities” has become such an over-used phrase. People say it, and yet many people don’t actually know what it means.

Too often, people’s idea of self-care activities involve more self-punishment. For example, exercise is a self-care activity. However, if you hate running and you force yourself to run as a “self-care activity,” it is no longer self-care. (So, what if you hate all exercise? Well, there are many other self-care ideas — 150 others — but, the truth is that I don’t think anyone actually hates ALL exercise. We were all children once and there was a time when moving our bodies in some way was a joy, not a pain... do you remember what that was? Even if you can’t still do that, what can you do that is similar? Can you start off slowly and work up to more?)

Self-care ideas are about being good to yourself. They don’t have to take up huge chunks of time. You can practice self-care by taking one minute out of every hour at work to just shut your eyes and breathe deeply

on headphones and listened to an mp3 of ocean waves crashing up on the shore. I just felt relaxed and “in the zone” all day. That is an example of self-care that was effective, free (it was a free app), and did not take any time except the time to download and install the app.



Use the self-care ideas that appeal to you most...

That is when you can consult this epic list of [self help](#) ideas. Jot down which ones you think might work for you and let the others flutter away from your mind. Some will be perfect for you while others might seem wildly inappropriate for your life and circumstances. Some cost nothing while others are expensive.

Some self-care ideas involve a lot of planning. Some self-care ideas are literally as easy as a walk in the park. It is a good idea to keep several self-care journals, which you can have on paper or in electronic format. For example, you could have one journal to log your physical exercise for the week. It serves as an encouragement to show what you have accomplished. Some of these journals could be replaced by apps — whatever you are most comfortable with.

Some self-care ideas are fun such as having a massage or going on vacation. However, others may be more difficult like cooking meals regularly, getting enough exercise, taking care of unpleasant tasks, etc. The benefit to doing the unpleasant self-care ideas is that you will feel a sense of freedom as a weight you didn't even realize was there is lifted from your shoulders.



Self-care ideas: put them on index cards in a jar...

This is about you. Do what works best for you. Choose your favorite self-care ideas. You can even make it a fun activity by writing down each self care idea on an index card (recipe card) and then folding it over and placing it in a big jar or a box. When you need self-care ideas, just reach into the box and randomly select a self care idea. (Pro tip: If you don't like the self care idea you selected, you can always try again!)

... and a jar for those self-care ideas that require a bit more planning...

Take the time to narrow this list to your own self care ideas because that is what is going to make this work for you. You might decide to keep some items on the list aside from the jar and place them in a second jar marked "self care plans". This is because some of the items require planning and/or saving money such as going to the ballet (if that is your thing) or going on a trip (if that is your thing). Other things are things that you can do at a moment's notice with no money at all such as looking at cat pictures on the internet, taking a bath (assuming you have a bath — I currently do not), and reading.



And now, the actual list of self-care ideas:

On to the self-care ideas list:

1. Go for a leisurely **walk**.
2. Try out a new **recipe**
3. Schedule personal self-care **time** each day.
4. Put on a homemade **face mask**.
5. Do **one thing at a time**. Multi-tasking is a stressful road.
6. Watch a chick flick (or whatever type of **movie** you like best).
7. Listen to your favorite **music**. **Sing**. Yell sing. Especially if no one is around.
Nevermind if you are off key. And even if people are around, singing is part of what makes us human!
8. **Read** a book just for fun, just for yourself.
9. Enjoy a **long, hot, bubble bath** (one of the best self-care ideas assuming you have a bathtub, which, sadly, I do not).
10. Schedule 5 – 10 minute **“play” breaks** during the work day. You can do anything fun and non-work-related during this time. For example, you could spend 5 minutes coloring while listening to music you really like. This all depends on your job, of course.
11. **Go to a spa**. If you can't afford a spa, go to a spa school — get worked on by students and get services at a discount. Many of these self-care ideas suggest going to see a student when you cannot afford a professional. That way, you can enjoy the service being offered without paying a premium.
12. **Order in dinner**. Or take a cooking class if you like cooking. Or try out a new and bold recipe (if you enjoy cooking).
13. **Sew, knit, crochet, cross-stitch, or quilt**. If you want to, you can start a group that meets weekly at a local coffee shop for a stitching group, thus giving yourself an evening out, an opportunity to meet new people, and a chance to enjoy a relaxing stitching session all in one...
14. Do **beading and/or jewelry-making** or any other craft you love.
15. Do [crossword puzzles](#) or [sudoku \(and other Japanese puzzles\)](#) or [cryptograms](#) or [word find](#).
16. Enjoy [high quality chocolate](#).
17. Go to the **library**. For the books, for the ambiance, for people-watching, to get out of the house, and the list of reasons goes on...
18. **Color** It is one of the most fashionable self-care ideas these days. Some awesome coloring books for



A. [Mandala Coloring Books](#)

B. [Johanna Basford's Popular Coloring Series](#)

C. [Inspirational/Religious Coloring Books](#)

D. [Swearly Coloring Books](#) – If swearing cheers you up...

19. **Hug** someone you love or a beloved pet.

20. **Relax outside.**

21. **Relax inside.**

22. **Volunteer** in the community in a way that is meaningful, energizing, and challenging.

23. Become a “**tourist**” in your own town, State, Province, or Country. Explore your environment. Find its beauty. Discover its secrets.

24. Make a **lunch date** with a close friend.

25. At the core of [mindfulness](#) is the idea of being physically, mentally, and emotionally present with your feelings. It takes time and practice to learn to be with and accept your own feelings. Feel free to **brainstorm a list of ways you can be more mindful** including general ways such as **yoga** and **meditation**, and specifics such as “keeping track of what I eat using this cool new app on my phone”. One good place to get started is with the excellent and bestselling book “[Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World](#)” by Mark Williams and Danny Penman.

26. **Unplug!!!** Plan to spend a certain length of time each day disconnected from the internet, the computer, my cell phone, my television, and all artificial distractions. After the length of time has elapsed, journal about what this experience was like and whether it is something you would like to plan to do regularly.

27. **Read poetry.** It is better to read it **out loud**. Note any interesting quotes or ideas that come from the poem.

28. Attend **church** services. Keep seeking until you find a church that **meshes well with your beliefs**. (If you do not believe, this one may not be for you — although the Unitarians, for example, accept people of all beliefs, even atheists — so, if you want to go to church, there is no reason not to go.)

29. Refresh yourself with mindfulness: have a **three minute mini-meditation session** in the middle of your day: one minute of awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and sensations followed by one minute of concentrating on your “belly breathing”, and one minute of considering how the whole body feels.

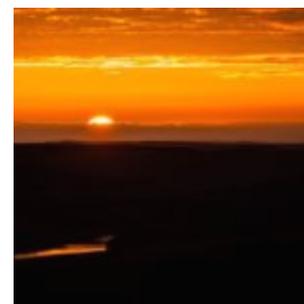
30. **Exercise** (of your choice).

31. Spiritual **prayer**.

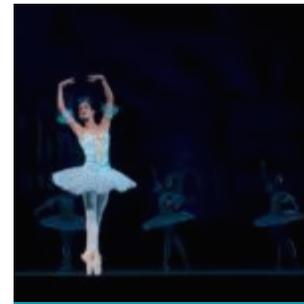
32. Attend a caring **support group**. Or make new friends by attending a local event at [meetup.com](#) for example.



34. Do **stretching exercises, yoga, or tai chi** for relaxation.
35. Head for the **water**... Go for a swim, scuba diving, wading, relaxing in a pool, or boating.
36. Meet a friend at the swimming pool, lake, or ocean instead of going for coffee. It is very relaxing to **float and chat** (or even to float in silent companionship).
37. Go to an **aquafit** class.
38. **Scratch one nagging item off the list:** Write a “to-do” list if you don’t already have one. Find the item that annoys you the most and do it.
39. Make a **list of your positive qualities** in your journal, starting with “I am...” on each line and listing as many as you can think of...
40. Keep track of **compliments** in your journal. Often, we might overlook or downplay the wonderful things that people say to us to the point that we might even forget what they said. By documenting these things, you can read them later and enjoy. (Career tip: it is also a good idea to keep a log of your achievements and all the things you have learned because this is not only an ego boost, but is your ally in earning stellar job performance reviews.)
41. Receive a **massage**. If you cannot afford a massage, consider going to a massage school. For half the price, you can have a massage from a massage student.
42. Journal a reflection around the idea of “I appreciate...”. To do this, set a timer for 15, 25, or 45 minutes. Then write “**I appreciate...**” and keep writing (uncensored — no erasing, no judging) until I feel stuck. Then write “I appreciate...” and keep going. Repeat until the timer rings. A few of these self-care ideas involve doing journal reflections or timed writing exercises.
43. Write your **thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes, and dreams** in a personal journal.
44. **Get sporty**... Attend an athletic event.
45. Belly dancing. Dancing that is even better when you have a belly...
46. Go to a foreign movie.
47. A good **glass of wine** at the end of the day (for those who drink).
48. See a counsellor, life coach, or pastor to **work through life’s challenges**.
49. Watch the **sunrise**.
50. Watch the **sunset**.
51. **Laugh**.
52. Concentrate on a **relaxing scenic image** from a book, the internet, etc.
Imagine that you are there. Use all five of your senses to think of what it would look, smell, sound, feel, and taste (?) like to be there. Feel free to journal about



53. Create a **collage representing “Who I really am”**. You could also make a collage representing “Who I am not” since often our dislikes help us understand ourselves also.
54. Listen to your favorite **podcast(s)**.
55. **Start your own podcast.**
56. **What do you want to watch next?** Plan what movies or TV shows you would like to watch next using [IMDB’s](#) top and most popular movies and TV shows or [Amazon’s](#) suggestions geared towards you to guide your search. Or you can browse through Netflix.
57. Go to the theatre and **see a play.**
58. Watch **improv** theatre.
59. Go to the **ballet.**
60. Go to the **symphony** or a concert.
61. Go to a **festival**. If there is an event you want to attend, but cannot afford, often venues look for event volunteers and, if you have time for that, that might be a way to enjoy the event. However, this is about self-care ideas, so please only do that if it increases the self-care in your life as opposed to adding stress.
62. Give yourself a **manicure**, get it done by a friend, get it done professionally, or get a student to do it.
63. Give yourself a **pedicure**, get it done by a friend, get it done professionally, or get a student to do it.
64. Sit and **relax in the back yard.**
65. Try something new and thrilling such as **skydiving.**
66. Sometimes self-care is about winding down and sometimes it is about letting off steam. In the spirit of letting off steam, **do one thing that scares you** (but is not actually too dangerous).
67. Read a [magazine](#).
68. Catch up on your favorite **blogs**. ([Like Riding a Bicycle](#))
69. Start your own **blog**.
70. Be **musical**: hum, whistle, or play a musical instrument. (P.S. You do not have to be good at any of these things.)
71. **Act like a kid again**: Go to the playground and swing, slide, see-saw. It is amazingly refreshing to do child-like activities sometimes.
72. Go to a **lake, beach, or neighborhood outdoor pool on a hot, sunny day.**
73. Pack a **picnic** lunch and make a date with yourself in the park with a nice book.
74. Go to the park and watch **ducks** or other wildlife.
75. Go to an ethical zoo if there is one nearby.



77. **Garden.**

78. Make a **list of new things you would eventually like to learn how to do.**

79. **Learn** how to do something new from the list made in 78 or take steps towards learning it such as signing up for a course or starting in on reading about it.

80. Ride a **bicycle.**

81. Go for a **photo walk.** This is exercise, nature, and photography (artistic expression) all in one. This is one of the most awesome self-care ideas!

82. Go to the **forest** and be with the trees.

83. Walk in the grass or sand with your **bare feet** (beware of pieces of glass, etc.).

84. **Get up early** and enjoy the quiet tranquility of the morning.

85. **Walk your dogs** (this is one of the self-care ideas I cannot do since, sadly, I have no dogs)

86. Make sure you **get enough sleep** on a regular basis (going to bed and getting up at about the same time each day). This is called sleep hygiene and can make a big difference to how we feel.

87. Good **nutrition:** Make yourself a nutritious and interesting meal. Try to make this a habit.

88. **Draw/paint a picture.** Talent not required. True story: When I used to put up my paintings, my friends would come over and say that my daughter was very good at painting for her age (she was five at the time). I was not offended. It is good to enjoy making art and to surround yourself with the art that you make.

89. Put on some **music** and move to the groove. It doesn't matter if anyone else calls what you are doing "dancing," you do your thing!

90. If you are really out of shape, you can get one of [those big blue exercise balls](#), sit on it and have bouncy fun to some music (because no one's watching). **Bouncing** creates a sense of euphoria; it is good for the immune system; and it will get your heart rate up without causing problems with your joints. Most of these balls can hold up to 600lbs, so you are likely not going to burst the ball if that concerns you.

(Disclaimer for all the exercises on this page: Please consult a physician before starting any sort of exercise regime, particularly if you have not been active in a while or have health issues.))

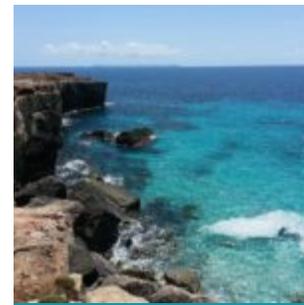
A. [This one has a handle and a weight limit of 250lbs, and it sure looks like fun.](#)

B. [This one looks like a little less fun, but it can hold up to 1000lbs, so you can have fun at almost any weight.](#)

91. **Trampoline.** If you don't have room for one, how about a [mini-trampoline](#)? If you do, be sure to get one for adults. Personally, I would get one with a bar to hold onto. As I mentioned before, **bouncing** is healthy and fun. You can do it to music. It is hard to believe that it is exercise. Well, the getting sweaty



103. Make a list of **museums** and **art galleries** that you would like to visit and visit one.
104. **Relax in a whirlpool/sauna at the local swimming pool.** I sometimes like to go to the wave pool because it feels great and reminds me of my childhood.
105. Enjoy a cool, refreshing glass of **water**. Staying hydrated is so important. Feel free to infuse your water with fresh fruits, lemon, lime, or just drink it as is.
106. Start a **gratitude journal**. Not only does Oprah think it's a good idea, but there is research to back that up.
107. Set limits for yourself. It is okay to **say no**.
108. **Ask** for what you need from others/the universe/etc.
109. Go outside the city and **gaze at the stars on** a clear night.
110. Go **camping**.
111. Wake up naturally (i.e. with **no alarm clock**).
112. Go **window shopping**.
113. **Write a love letter to yourself**.
114. **Buy you something nice!** Treat yourself to a **gift** that you have been wanting and can afford.
115. Go on a **vacation**. Or, if you can't afford a vacation, go on a staycation — where you put all your worries on hold, ignore all your chores, and simply enjoy each moment while staying at home.
116. Create with **clay/pottery**.
117. **Pet** an animal. Preferably a friendly one.
118. Go on a **wine tasting tour**.
119. Watch **funny or cute YouTube videos**. This has been clinically proven to release stress and be very good for your mental and physical health.
120. Lie down on the grass and stare up at the sky, watching the **clouds** and imagining shapes in them.
121. Make a list of **positive affirmations** and then practice saying them out loud.
122. Write a **reflection in your journal about your abilities and successes in life**. Start each sentence with either "I can..." or "I have succeeded in..." Do this as a timed writing exercise for 15 – 45 minutes.
123. **Write a poem** expressing your innermost thoughts and feelings. It does not have to rhyme.
124. **Make a bouquet of flowers** from the garden.
125. Read a **motivational book**. Such as:



126. Read an **uplifting book**. Such as:

A. [“The Number One Ladies Detective Agency”](#)

B. [“The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared”](#)

127. **Write a reflection in your journal about what you value most in life.** Start with, “What I value most in life is...” Similar to the other reflections, write as long as you can on this topic (set a timer for 15 – 45 minutes). Keep writing until the timer runs out. If you run out of things to say, rewrite the original phrase, “What I value most in life is...” and begin again. Remember: There is no “wrong” way to do a reflection.

128. **Spend time with someone you care about:** Take the time to phone, Skype, or text a special friend. Better yet, go meet with them in person. Socialize.

129. Go to a **bar**. Relax and have a drink. Ask for extra cherries in the drink if desired. Maybe go to a karaoke bar if you are so inclined.

130. Plan and take a **road trip** (or take a road trip with no plan).

131. Buy a decadent **treat** at the grocery store or your favorite bakery.

132. Get your **hair** done at the salon or if you cannot afford the salon, the hair styling school.

133. Make or buy a batch of **ice cream** and eat it. Okay, maybe not all of it. Or all of it. I am not judging.

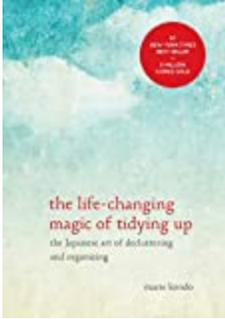
134. Cook a **fancy meal for some close friends**.

135. **Set boundaries.** Say “no” to someone. Did someone ask you to do something and you have no “reason” not to? Well, here’s your reason: you have plans. Self-care plans. Often we agree to do things just because we have no reason not to. If you don’t yet feel comfortable with the word “no,” or you don’t know what to say when someone just springs something on you, here are some magic words, “oh — that sounds good, but let me get back to you about it.” “Off the top of my head, I don’t think I am busy, but let me get back to you about it...” This buys you some time. Learn to be more vague and get your life back.

136. Go to the **farmer’s market**.

137. **Wear a dress or clothing that makes you feel great.** Or simply wander around naked. Betty Page spoke about how she liked to take “air baths” by simply walking around her home **naked**. She found it liberating and it made her feel more comfortable in her own skin. (If you have a room-mate, this can go wrong as I found out the hard way. However, we are all human, after all, and there are some religious groups in the world that actually believe it is sinful to wear clothes. Also, this can be a good way to deter your room-mate from barging into your space unannounced.) Or wear a pretty dress.

138. **Declutter** a room. Join the revolution: [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing](#) by Marie Kondo.



139. **Bake something.** Just for fun. (You can use [unusual-shaped silicone cake pans](#) for fun.)

140. Preparing and **drinking good tea** can be a peaceful ritual of self-care. Choose a tea that you really enjoy and drink out of cups that are special to you. Note that you can often get very interesting cups second hand at the Salvation Army or other charity thrift shops, which is a triple blessing because you save money, you help others, and you get a beautiful item that no one will know was second hand. I used to feel weird about second hand cups and glasses until someone pointed out to me that I don't feel strange eating in a restaurant... boom!



141. Listen to a [guided meditation](#) CD or mp3. Just allow yourself to fully relax. This is another one of my favorite self-care ideas.

142. Treat yourself to a **delicious and healthy restaurant meal** (yes – delicious and healthy is possible).

143. **Go to bed early.** Because if you go to bed early, you can get up early and the early bird gets the worm... and if you have worms, you can go fishing... have you ever gone fishing? I haven't, but I have always wanted to. That's the sort of thing one should do for self-care: if you have always wanted to go fishing, find a friend who fishes and ask him/her to take you along.

144. **Crafting.** And **making your own lemonade.** Because there's nothing better than homemade lemonade and also, when life gives you lemons... but, seriously, if you feel like it's all lemons lately, why NOT make lemonade? You can invite some friends over to do some crafting and serve them homemade lemonade.

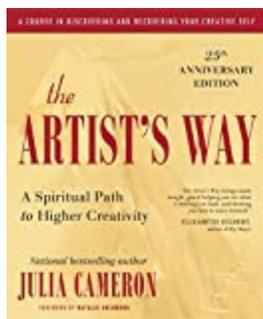
145. **Sleep in.** Can you afford to sleep in for one day? Can you afford NOT to sleep in for one day? Choose a day when you don't have anything critical on the go and just allow yourself the luxury of sleeping in and lounging around in your pyjamas long past when you consider it decent to do so.



147. Create an on-line course.

148. **Write** a novel, screenplay, short story, or whatever else you have inside of you. Write your memoirs.

Write for yourself, not just because the best writing is that which we do just for ourselves, but because it is most satisfying and therapeutic. And cathartic. And good. Go through Julia Cameron's "[The Artist's Way](#)," and discover your soul of an artist because we all have a creative spark in us even though it may manifest differently in different people.



149. **Forgive.** Forgive is about letting go of anger, hatred, and so many negative emotions. It is not about the person being forgiven or whether they “deserve” to be forgiven. It is we who deserve the peace that comes along with truly forgiving someone. This might not happen overnight. For now, perhaps just write a “release letter” letting the person you want to forgive know how they have wronged you and why it is upsetting. End the letter by forgiving them if you are ready. You do not have to send the letter — in fact it is often better to throw it out when you are done. It might not be immediately obvious how this fits in with the other self-care ideas. However, this process can be very cathartic.

150. **Plan a surprise for someone you know who truly deserves it.** It doesn't have to be expensive. Being kind, thoughtful, and making someone's day can be a really wonderful way to nourish your soul. Often, when we focus on helping others and giving to others, it makes our own struggles and burdens seem smaller somehow.

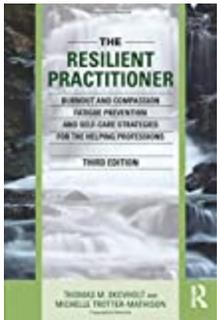
151. **Do one thing today just because it makes you happy.**

It's funny how, often we might think of self-care activities as “wasting time,” when actually they are the very activities that keep us going, prevent burnout and make life worth living!



Conclusion

It is important to take regular time in your day for self-care. Although it may seem decadent at times, it is our self-care activities that protect us from burnout. For example, someone who takes the time to exercise regularly and eat homemade nutritional meals might build up more resilience against stress than, say, someone who never exercises and only eats fast food.



The nice thing about self care is that it not only helps us, but it helps those around us because we are more energized and refreshed and can provide a more positive outlook. Those who have been on airplanes will recall that the flight attendants always tell you that in case of an emergency, if the air mask comes down from the ceiling, you should put your own mask on first, prior to helping your child or another person. They don't say that just to be kind. They say it because if you don't, in the event of an emergency, you are liable to pass out before you can put your own mask on. And you might even pass out before you finish helping your child.

Taking care of yourself first is essential to navigate the hectic pace of modern life. Building up a well of resilience is your best ally in learning to live a peaceful, productive, and enjoyable life. These self-care ideas can go a long way to helping you to build up your resilience.

Feel free to add your comments as well as your favorite self-care activities below.