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SELF-CARE
TIPS FOR
STRESS RELIEF

WOMEN'S
HEALTH GUIDE



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Self-care isn't selfish—it's essential

Somewhere along the way, we learned that putting yourself first is something to apologize for. That rest is laziness. That needing space means you don't care enough. But psychology tells a different story — one where taking care of yourself isn't a retreat from responsibility. It's what makes responsibility sustainable in the first place.

The idea that mental health self-care is selfish collapses quickly under scrutiny. Self-care psychology shows clearly that people who neglect their own needs don't become more available to others — they become depleted, reactive, and eventually less able to show up at all. Building a genuine self-care routine isn't an indulgence. It's maintenance. And, as with any maintenance, skipping it has real costs.

Why taking care of yourself helps others too

There's a concept in cognitive psychology called ego depletion — the idea that self-regulation draws on a limited resource that runs out. When it does, emotional control weakens, patience disappears, and the ability to think clearly under pressure declines. This is what chronic neglect of mental health self-care looks like from the inside: not dramatic collapse, but a gradual erosion of your best self.

Self-care psychology is built on a straightforward premise: a regulated person regulates better in relationships. When your own emotional needs are met, you have more patience for others, greater capacity for empathy, and greater flexibility in difficult conversations. When they aren't, every interaction costs more than it should.



The ripple effect of consistent self-care tends to show up as:

- More patience with the people you live and work with
- Greater emotional availability — being present rather than half-distracted by internal noise
- Stronger recovery after conflict or a hard day, rather than carrying it forward
- Clearer thinking and better decisions when it matters

Self-compassion vs. selfishness: Understanding the difference

Selfishness is about taking more than your share — at someone else's expense. Self-compassion is something different: it's treating yourself with the same basic decency you'd offer a friend who's struggling. The distinction matters because many people carry genuine guilt about rest, boundaries,

and simply having needs — guilt that's rarely applied with the same intensity toward anyone else.

Psychologist Kristin Neff's research on self-compassion identifies three core elements: self-kindness (rather than self-judgment), recognizing that struggle is part of shared human experience, and holding difficult emotions with awareness rather than avoidance. Each of these supports mental health self-care in concrete ways — they reduce the inner criticism that makes recovery harder and create the psychological safety needed to actually change.

In practice, self-compassion looks less like bubble baths and more like:

- Letting yourself rest without mentally cataloging everything you "should" be doing instead
- Responding to your own mistakes with perspective rather than prolonged self-attack
- Recognizing when you're overwhelmed and adjusting — rather than pushing until something breaks
- Asking for help without framing it as a weakness

This is harder for some people than for others — especially those with a long history of tying their worth to output and availability. Therapy can be a useful space to start untangling those patterns.

How a healthy self-care routine reduces stress and prevents burnout

A self-care routine works because consistency matters more than intensity. One extraordinary weekend of rest does less than small, reliable practices built into ordinary days — because stress is also daily, and the nervous system responds to patterns more than to exceptions.

Self-care for stress operates on both psychological and physiological levels. Sleep restores the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain responsible for judgment, emotional regulation, and impulse control. Movement reduces cortisol and increases the neurochemicals associated with mood and resilience. Boundaries prevent the steady drain of energy caused by chronic overcommitment. Mindful breaks interrupt the stress cycle before it compounds.

A realistic self-care routine for stress prevention doesn't have to be elaborate:

- Consistent sleep and wake times — even on weekends — as a foundation for everything else
- One form of movement you actually enjoy, not the kind you endure
- At least one daily transition point where you fully step away from work, even briefly
- Boundaries around availability — when you're reachable, and when you're not
- Regular connection with people who restore rather than drain you

Building sustainable healthy habits that support mental health

The problem with most self-care advice is that it assumes more time, more energy, and more motivation than most people actually have. Healthy habits that last aren't built on willpower or perfect conditions — they're built small, attached to things you already do, and sustained by being realistic rather than aspirational.

Research on habit formation suggests that the size of the action matters less than its regularity. A two-minute breathing practice done daily builds more neural infrastructure than an hour of meditation done once a month. The same principle applies to every element of mental health self-care: frequency and consistency beat occasional intensity every time.

When building healthy habits that support your mental health, a few principles help:

- Start smaller than feels meaningful — then actually do it, rather than planning the ideal version
- Stack new habits onto existing routines rather than carving out new time you don't have
- Treat lapses as information rather than failure — what made it harder? What would make it easier?
- Measure by consistency over weeks, not by how you feel on any single day

Choosing self-care for stress isn't choosing yourself over others. It's choosing a version of yourself that has something real to give. You don't have to build this alone.

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Key financial questions every woman should ask

Your money should work hard to help create a secure financial future. While financial planning is important for everyone, women often face unique financial challenges. Women may experience pay gaps, career breaks for caregiving, higher healthcare costs and longer life expectancies. These factors make thoughtful financial planning especially important.

As a result, experts suggest women pay close attention to financial decisions throughout their lives. Asking the right questions at each stage can help build financial security and confidence.

In your 20s and 30s

Your twenties and thirties are critical years for establishing financial habits and saving for retirement. Starting early allows investments more time to grow through compound interest.

Important questions to consider:

- How can I become more comfortable with investing?
- If my employer offers a retirement plan like a 401(k), how much should I contribute?
- If I marry, should my spouse and I combine finances or keep some accounts separate?
- If I decide to take time off to raise children, how could it affect my long-term financial security?

Developing strong financial habits early can have a significant impact on future stability.

In your 40s and 50s

During midlife, financial responsibilities

often increase. Many women are managing careers while raising children, paying mortgages, saving for college, and planning for retirement.

At this stage, it may help to evaluate long-term financial goals and adjust plans if needed.

Key questions include:

- Should I work with a financial advisor to help manage my finances?
- How can I save for my children's education while still prioritizing retirement?
- If my relationship or marriage changes, what financial steps should I take?
- How can I support aging parents without putting my own financial future at risk?

Balancing these responsibilities requires careful planning and regular financial check-ins.

Age 60 and beyond

Later in life, financial priorities often shift toward retirement planning and long-term security. Many people begin thinking about travel, hobbies, spending time with family, or even starting new ventures.

Important financial questions include:

- Should I continue working past traditional retirement age?
- When is the best time to start receiving Social Security benefits?
- How should I plan for healthcare costs in retirement?
- If I become widowed, how can I maintain financial independence?

Planning ahead can help ensure financial stability during retirement and provide peace of mind.

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The power of meaningful female friendships

Female friendships hold a special place in many women's lives, offering a source of connection and strength that is deeply fulfilling. These relationships go beyond casual companionship, providing a network of understanding, empathy, and support. The importance of these friendships lies not only in the joy they bring but also in the positive effects they have on mental and emotional well-being. Strong female friendships help create a foundation of trust and connection that enriches life in countless ways.

One of the unique qualities of female friendships is the ability to offer genuine empathy. Women often find comfort in sharing their experiences with friends who truly understand their struggles and joys. Whether dealing with personal challenges or celebrating life's milestones, the bond between close female friends allows for authentic expressions of emotion. This sense of being seen and heard can be deeply healing, providing relief and reassurance during tough times. Empathy within these relationships strengthens the connection and helps both individuals grow emotionally.

Support is another cornerstone of strong female friendships. Friends offer encouragement during difficult moments and celebrate successes without hesitation. This support can take many forms, from giving practical advice to simply



being present when someone needs company. In moments of doubt or insecurity, having a friend who believes in you can make a significant difference. The mutual nature of this support fosters a sense of balance in the relationship, as both friends contribute to each other's well-being.

Understanding plays a key role in the unique nature of female friendships. Women often share similar life experiences, which makes it easier for them to relate to one another on a deeper level. This understanding builds trust and creates a safe space where friends can be themselves without fear of judgment.

When people feel understood, they are more likely to open up and form meaningful connections. This kind of emotional intimacy strengthens friendships and helps them endure over time.

To build and maintain strong female friendships, certain practices can help deepen these connections. Active listening is an important skill that shows genuine interest in what a friend is sharing. Giving someone your full attention and acknowledging their feelings can make them feel valued and respected. This simple act fosters trust and encourages open communication, which is essential for a healthy friendship.

Another way to nurture female friendships is through open communication. Being honest about feelings and needs helps prevent misunderstandings and keeps the relationship strong. Expressing gratitude for each other and addressing issues as they arise can help friendships grow in a positive direction. Open communication allows friends to navigate challenges together, reinforcing their bond.

Spending quality time together is also important for maintaining strong friendships. Whether it's enjoying a shared hobby, having deep conversations over coffee, or going on a weekend trip, these moments create lasting memories. Making time for each other, even during busy periods, shows commitment to the relationship. Shared experiences help deepen the connection and strengthen the emotional bond between friends.

The benefits of strong female friendships extend to many aspects of life, including mental health. Having friends who offer emotional support can reduce feelings of loneliness and help combat anxiety and depression. Knowing that someone cares and is willing to listen provides a sense of security and stability. This emotional connection can have a calming effect, helping to manage stress and improve overall mental well-being.

Female friendships also contribute to happiness. The joy of sharing laughter, stories, and experiences with close friends can brighten even the toughest days. These connections create a sense of belonging that enhances self-esteem and

promotes a positive outlook on life. The emotional boost from spending time with friends can improve mood and energy levels, making life feel more fulfilling.

In addition to mental health benefits, female friendships can also reduce stress. Talking through problems with someone who understands can relieve the pressure of dealing with challenges alone. Friends often provide a fresh perspective or helpful advice that eases worry and confusion. The act of connecting with someone who cares has a soothing effect, helping to lower stress and restore a sense of calm.

To sustain these benefits over the long term, it's important to invest effort into friendships. Regularly checking in with friends, celebrating their achievements, and being present during tough times show that the relationship matters. Mutual effort ensures that the friendship remains balanced and continues to grow. As life changes and responsibilities increase, prioritizing these connections helps keep them strong.

Maintaining friendships also involves respecting boundaries. Understanding and honoring each other's limits creates a sense of respect and trust. Everyone has different needs and schedules, so being flexible and understanding helps avoid unnecessary strain on the relationship. Respecting boundaries shows that you value your friend's well-being and are committed to a healthy dynamic.

Female friendships often become a source of inspiration and motivation. Friends encourage each other to pursue goals, face challenges, and grow as individuals. This positive influence can lead to personal development and a greater sense of purpose. Having someone who believes in your potential can inspire confidence and drive, making it easier to take on new opportunities and challenges.

Over time, these friendships can evolve and deepen, creating a sense of shared history that becomes a source of strength. Reflecting on the memories and experiences shared over the years reminds friends of the value of their connection. This shared history builds a foundation of trust and loyalty that stands the test of time. Even when life takes friends in different directions, the bond remains, providing comfort and support across distances and years.

In short, female friendships are a vital part of many women's lives, offering unique qualities like empathy, support, and understanding that enhance emotional well-being. These relationships bring joy, reduce stress, and improve mental health, creating a sense of connection that enriches life. By practicing active listening, open communication, and spending quality time together, women can build and maintain strong friendships that stand the test of time. Investing in these relationships fosters a sense of belonging and mutual growth, making them a valuable and lasting source of happiness.



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Why heart disease looks different in women

Know the symptoms and risks unique to women, and learn how a heart-healthy diet and exercise can help protect you.

Heart disease is the most common cause of death for both women and men in the United States. But some heart disease symptoms in women can differ from those in men. Knowing the symptoms of a heart attack and heart disease may help save a life.

Heart attack symptoms for women

Chest pain is the most common symptom of heart attack in men and women. But women are more likely than men to have symptoms that may seem unrelated to a heart attack, such as nausea and brief pain in the neck or back.

Women often describe heart attack chest pain as pressure or tightness. But it's possible to have a heart attack without chest pain.

Women are more likely than men to have these symptoms of a heart attack:

- Neck, jaw, shoulder, upper back or upper stomach pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain in one or both arms.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Sweating.
- Lightheadedness or dizziness.
- Unusual fatigue.
- Heartburn, also called indigestion.

These symptoms may be vague but more noticeable than the chest pain.

Compared with men, women tend to have symptoms more often when resting, or even when asleep. Emotional stress can play a role in triggering heart attack symptoms too.

Women are more likely than men to have a heart attack with no severe blockage in an artery. When this happens, it's called nonobstructive coronary artery disease.

Also, women tend to have blockages not only in their main arteries but also in the smaller ones that supply blood to the heart. A blockage in the smaller arteries is called small vessel heart disease or coronary microvascular disease.

When to see a doctor

If you have symptoms of a heart attack or think you're having one, get emergency medical help right away. Don't drive yourself to the hospital unless you have no other way to get there.

Heart disease risk factors for women

Heart disease risk factors include high cholesterol, high blood pressure and obesity. They affect both women and men. But other things may play a bigger role in the development of heart disease in women.

Women are more likely than men to have health conditions that increase the risk of heart disease such as:

Smoking. Smoking is a greater risk factor for heart disease in women than it is in men.

Not being active. A lack of physical activity is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Emotional stress and depression. Stress and depression may affect women's hearts more than men's. Depression may make it difficult to maintain a healthy



lifestyle and follow recommended treatment for other health conditions.

Diabetes. Women with diabetes are more likely to develop heart disease than are men with diabetes. Also, because diabetes can change the way people feel pain, there's an increased risk of having a silent heart attack. A silent heart attack is one that happens without symptoms.

Menopause. Low levels of estrogen after menopause increase the risk of developing small vessel heart disease.

Pregnancy complications. High blood pressure or diabetes during pregnancy can increase women's long-term risk of high blood pressure and diabetes. These conditions also make women more likely to get heart disease.

Family history of early heart disease. This appears to be a greater risk factor in women than in men.

Other health conditions. Some autoimmune diseases, such as lupus and scleroderma, and inflammatory conditions also raise the risk of heart disease.

Everyone should take heart disease seriously. Women under age 65 — especially those with a family history of heart disease — should pay close attention to heart disease risk factors.

Lifestyle and home remedies

Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Try these heart-healthy steps:

Do not smoke or use tobacco. Smoking damages blood vessels. It is a major risk factor for heart disease. If you smoke and can't quit, talk with your healthcare team about programs or treatments that can help.

Eat a healthy diet. Choose whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats. Eat less salt and sugar. Don't eat saturated or trans fats.

Exercise and keep a healthy weight. If you're overweight, losing even a few pounds can lower your risk of

heart disease. Ask your healthcare team what weight is best for you.

Manage stress. Stress can cause the arteries to get tight. This can increase the risk of heart disease, particularly coronary microvascular disease. Some ways to beat stress are to get more exercise, practice mindfulness and connect with others in support groups.

Limit alcohol. If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women and up to two drinks a day for men.

Control blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol. Make lifestyle changes and take medicines as directed. Get regular health checkups.

Get good sleep. Poor sleep may increase the risk of heart disease and other health conditions. Adults should aim for 7 to 9 hours daily.

Exercise and heart health

Regular activity helps keep the heart healthy. In general, try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking at a brisk pace, on most days of the week. If that's more than you can do, start slowly and build up. Even five minutes a day of exercise has health benefits.

For a bigger health boost, get about 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise a day, five days a week. Also do strength training exercises two or more days a week.

It's OK to break up your workouts into several 10-minute sessions during a day. You'll still get the same heart-health benefits.

Interval training switches between short bursts of intense activity and lighter activity. It can help people keep a healthy weight and improve blood pressure. To do this, try adding short bursts of jogging or fast walking into your regular walks.

You can also add exercise to your daily activities with these tips:

- Take the stairs instead of an elevator.
- Walk or ride your bike to work or to do errands.
- March in place while watching television.

Heart disease treatment in women

In general, heart disease treatment in women and in men is similar. It can include medicines, angioplasty and stenting, or coronary artery bypass surgery.

Some differences in heart disease treatment among men and women are:

- Women are less likely to be treated with aspirin and statins to prevent future heart attacks than are men. However, studies show the benefits are similar in both groups.

- Women are less likely than men to have coronary artery bypass surgery. This may be because women have less obstructive disease or smaller arteries with more small vessel disease.

- Cardiac rehabilitation can improve health and aid recovery from heart disease. However, women are less likely to be sent to cardiac rehabilitation than men are.

-The Mayo Clinic



Self-care tips to help women manage stress

March is Women's History Month, which it is a good time to pause and take a look at how women can take care of their mental health, which is often less talked about, but just as important as medical health. Mental health is more than just the presence or absence of a diagnosed mental illness — it's essential to your overall health and quality of life. It encompasses emotional, psychological, social well-being — the whole woman. It affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others.

We can all help improve our mental health through self-care. Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical, emotional and mental health. For some, self-care is a preventative strategy and a means for maintaining overall wellness. For others with a diagnosed mental illness, self-care can be key in supporting your treatment and recovery. According to the NIMH, when it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact.

Here are some tips to help you get started with self-care:

Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Doing exercise in groups is a form of connection, which is beneficial to reducing isolation and managing depression, GAD and PTSD.

Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated. A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus

throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages.

Make sleep a priority. Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.

Try a relaxing activity. Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate mindful meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy, such as journaling, writing poetry, and keeping a gratitude list.

Set goals and priorities. Boundaries are a healthy part of managing one's mental health. Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much.

Stay connected. Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help. Connection is the antidote to managing our mental health and isolation is our poison. Keeping a balance with connection and healthy solitude are key.

Self-care and wellness look different for everyone, so it is important to find what you need and enjoy. Taking the time to discover what works best for you means cultivating and making self-care a priority every day. Self-care is not a cure for mental illness, but understanding what causes or triggers your mild symptoms and what coping techniques work for you can help manage your mental health.

Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do. A week

is like a 168-hour checkbook — balance your life with important deposits in your life that will add to your wellness.




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