

Name: _____ Class: _____

Self-Care

By Set to Go
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Taking care of ourselves is part of becoming independent. This informational text explores some important self-care strategies and the benefits of practicing them. As you read, take notes about strategies for taking care of yourself and the possible benefits of those strategies.

- [1] How often have you heard people say “take care” or “take care of yourself”? Have you ever stopped to wonder what that means exactly? How do you “take care of yourself”? Well, keeping your mind and body healthy and safe is fundamental¹ to staying alive and thriving as a person. This would include things like making sure you get enough sleep and eat a healthy diet. It would include taking steps to get healthy if you are ill, managing the stress in your life effectively and making choices to keep yourself safe. Being safe also means not misusing dangerous substances, driving safely and not taking needless physical risks. There are a lot of things you need to do to “take care of yourself” but many of these things are not that hard to do.



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Luckily, we are built with automatic alert mechanisms.² If we pay attention, our bodies let us know when we are tired, need to rest or need to sleep. We feel hungry when we need to eat and often feel sick when we eat too much food that is not healthy for us.

Even though our bodies give us plenty of information, we still need to learn how to pay attention and respond when our body tells us that it needs something. We need to learn how to make good choices about what will keep things from going wrong or from putting ourselves into unhealthy or unsafe situations.

As young children, our parents, family, and caretakers make most of our health decisions for us. They work to keep us safe. As we grow, we have to combine our experiences and what we learn about the world to keep ourselves safe. We need to learn to interpret³ the signals our bodies provide and understand how to respond. As we grow up we will manage more and more of our own self-care.

1. **Fundamental (adjective):** necessary
2. a natural process by which something takes place
3. **Interpret (verb):** understand

Self-Care Strategies

- [5] Your body is an extraordinary machine. It changes over time, interacts with the world, adapts to different environments, and can usually fix itself when broken or wounded (sometimes with some help). But, like other machines, it needs proper fuel (nutrition), rest (sleep) and maintenance (exercise) to function properly. Without attention to these basic needs, the machine can become less efficient⁴ and you can get sick. A way we can stay healthy and prepare for future challenges is to maintain positive self-care strategies.

Sleep

Believe it or not, you're supposed to get between 9 – 9 ½ hours of sleep per night – when was the last time you got that much sleep? Sleep and rest are incredibly important for your well-being — it's a simple life skill (even if it is not always so simple to get the right amount of sleep) that can have a really positive impact on many parts of your life. Good sleep improves learning, concentration, memory, mood, attitude, energy, digestion, and heart health; it promotes growth, performance, and safety. No one exactly knows how sleep happens, but we know that during sleep we are taking in less information from the outside world and organizing information in our brains. And we can't go for long without sleep before our functioning suffers dramatically. Have you ever stayed up for a full 24 hours? How did you feel? People who are sleep deprived typically have trouble doing fairly simple things they can usually handle – like writing or driving. A good rule of thumb is that if you're feeling tired, moody, sick or just off, try getting a good night's sleep! Young people typically need at least 8 hours of sleep a night to feel and function well – and many actually need more than 8 hours. A bit of good news is that if you miss out on getting enough sleep one night, you can usually make up your sleep deficit⁵ by getting a good night's sleep the next.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is another life skill that can promote emotional and physical health. How long could you survive without food or water? Actually, you cannot survive more than a few days without food or water. But having the right fluids and food is not just a matter of survival. Our bodies are so complex that we need a wide variety of fluids and different types of materials to keep us healthy. We burn carbohydrates as fuel, use protein to produce new cells and tissue (a constant process) and use fat to store energy. We need fluids to move materials about in our bodies (through our bloodstream) and electrolytes to allow our nerves and muscles to fire. You should aim for a balanced diet and avoid things such as too much caffeine or sugar. Remember that when your body is healthy and in nutritional balance, you're bound to feel your best — and feeling your best can boost your emotional health.

4. **Efficient** (*adjective*): working in a well-organized way

5. **Deficit** (*noun*): the amount by which something is too small

Exercise

Another life skill that will benefit your emotional and physical health is exercise. Just as your body needs rest to repair itself, your body also needs to be used regularly to work most efficiently. The way we use our bodies is by moving. When you think about it, exercise is just moving in an organized (and sometimes repetitive) way. But working our bodies in this way helps just about every part of our bodies. Of course exercising works our muscles, but it also works our hearts and lungs when we do it over some time (this is commonly called “cardio” or aerobic conditioning). Many exercises also strengthen our bones and there is even evidence that exercise makes our brains work more efficiently too!

It's true that exercise can boost your mood and release stress. It can be a good way to take your mind off your problems and help you cope. Exercise is good for physical strength, energy, and stamina. It helps release “feel-good” hormones called endorphins. Exercise doesn't solve problems, but it is a life skill that can boost your ability to face them.

- [10] You don't have to belong to a gym or run a marathon to get helpful exercise. It is just fine if you get exercise in the normal course of events – walking to school, playing ball, mowing the lawn, taking a hike, doing dishes or laundry are all exercise. The goal is simply to work as many different parts of your body on a regular basis and to keep moving for 20-30 minutes several times each week.

Living a balanced life.

Besides taking care of your physical and mental health, what is self-care? It's the skills that allow you to take care of yourself, and to take responsibility for all the things that go into managing your life. When you're independent and no longer living with your parents or guardians, it's going to be up to you to develop the skills to manage your “stuff” on your own.

As you grow older, you will likely come to realize that more often than not moderation – living between the extremes – is a pretty good way to have a life that can balance enjoyment and health and safety. Take food as an example; consuming too little or being too limited about what you eat can be dangerous. Overdoing it is also a dangerous idea and can lead you to be unhealthy in other ways. Or, consider studying. It is definitely good to be responsible; to take your schoolwork seriously and put the necessary time into it. At the same time, you need to be able to balance that with some enjoyment, recreation, and exercise. This will help you be more effective in your work but also make you healthier.

As we grow up we are constantly exposed to new opportunities, possibilities and “adventures.” Some of these things are exciting and enticing. But many, especially if overdone (like eating, drinking alcohol) can involve some risk or danger. So on the one hand, it is great to find ways to have some fun and explore new people, places, and activities. But remember, too much, even of things that might be exciting or enjoyable, can lead you to risk or be bad for your health.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. Not everyone has time for self-care, but it's important to try.
 - B. Self-care involves avoiding unhealthy food, stress, and risky situations.
 - C. Some people's bodies respond better than others to self-care strategies.
 - D. Responding to bodily signals and practicing self-care strategies can improve physical and mental health.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "As young children, our parents, family, and caretakers make most of our health decisions for us." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "But, like other machines, [the body] needs proper fuel (nutrition), rest (sleep) and maintenance (exercise) to function properly. Without attention to these basic needs, the machine can become less efficient and you can get sick." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "People who are sleep deprived typically have trouble doing fairly simple things they can usually handle – like writing or driving." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "So on the one hand, it is great to find ways to have some fun and explore new people, places, and activities." (Paragraph 13)

3. What is the author's main purpose in the text?
 - A. to teach readers how to set self-care goals
 - B. to teach readers some strategies for self-care
 - C. to reassure readers about the decisions they're making
 - D. to reassure readers that they don't have to think much about self-care

4. What connection does the author draw between sleep and simple tasks?
 - A. They both require focus and dedication.
 - B. They both seem very difficult because life is so busy.
 - C. Getting too little sleep can make simple tasks very difficult.
 - D. Getting enough sleep means there are fewer simple tasks to do.

5. How do the self-care strategies detailed in the text lead to improved physical and mental health? Cite evidence from the text in your response.

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Which self-care habits described in the text seem most useful to you? Which do you already practice? Why do you think you have good habits around those self-care strategies?
2. Why are self-care strategies important to develop as individuals grow up? Why are these strategies important as individuals gain more independence?