

Building Better Habits

Self-care 101

College life is full of stress – worrying about money, pressure to perform academically, being away from home for the first time, full schedules, working full or part time, and so on. A 2021 study found that about half of all college students reported moderate or severe psychological stress and being lonely; 26% responded that they had considered suicide. Self-care isn't just for people in or close to crisis.

Doing the following can help you adapt to changes, build strong relationships, and recover from setbacks.

1) Create a routine and keep it.

Routines have many benefits (see The Importance of a Routine). When it comes to mental health, having routines gives you a sense of control. The lack of a routine can cause stress, insecurity, and make you feel like you're unproductive.¹

2) Sleep.

7-9 hours, period. Sleep enhances your memory, can help with creativity, protects against gaining fat, lowers food cravings, reduces the risk of cancer and dementia, and it feels good. Sleep deprivation can cause symptoms of depression¹ and also decrease cognitive functioning by up to 30%.²

3) Get regular exercise.

Almost everyone can find some form of exercise they like – lifting weights, jogging, swimming, hiking, walking, etc. The possibilities are endless. The mental health benefits are not: increased feelings of happiness, increased ability to perform daily tasks, and decreased feelings of depression and anxiety.¹

4) Eat nutritious meals.

Like exercise, a nutritious and balanced diet has physical benefits. It also has mental benefits. It can help you think clearly, increase attention span, and reduce feelings of anxiety and depression.¹

5) Stay hydrated.

Your brain is 73% water. Hydrating helps your brain function to its full potential. Dehydration can cause the brain to start shutting down, which can lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as difficulty with mental tasks.¹

6) Practice mindfulness, meditation and gratitude.

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present – thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It can be done with conscious effort or with meditation. Mindfulness can increase our ability to manage stress, be more self-aware, increase patience, increase tolerance, and improve sleep quality. Starting your day by writing down the things you're grateful for can improve your mood.¹

7) Clean up.

Like having a routine, decluttering your bag, dorm/bedroom, desk, etc. can give you a feeling of control. Doing so can also improve your mood and reduce anxiety. It also makes life easier to have a clean space.¹

¹ Nelson, ALice. 2022. "Seven Self-Care Tips for College Students." Mental Health First Aid. August 15, 2022. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2022/08/seven-self-care-tips-for-college-students/>.

² Visnov, Jocelyn. 2020. Review of *Think Twice before Pulling an "All Nighter," Matthew Walker Explains It All*. The Quadrangle. Manhattan College. December 7, 2020. <https://mcquad.org/2020/12/07/think-twice-before-pulling-an-all-nighter-matthew-walker-explains-it-all/>.

