16 Ways To Practice Self-Care That Cost Next To Nothing

Self-care doesn't have to be expensive. Here are some super-affordable ways to take better care of yourself, starting now.
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In the age of Instagram, "self-care" has become synonymous with indulgences like massages, facials, fancy products, boutique workout classes and lavish vacations. That all sounds great if you have tons of disposable income. But for most of us, spending serious cash on self-care just isn't realistic.

"The whole concept of self-care has really strayed from the original intent, and become a meme unto itself," said Kathleen Dahlen deVos, a psychotherapist in San Francisco. "When I talk with my clients about self-care, rarely am I encouraging practices and habits that cost money. In fact, spending excessive money or funds we don't have In the name of 'self-care' can actually be distressing, destructive and work against our mental and emotional wellbeing."

We asked experts in the wellness space to share some of the best ways to practice self-care that are basically free. Here's what they told us:

1. Spend some time outside.

Take a walk around the block, sit in the grass, hike a local trail or just let the sun shine on your face for a few minutes.

"No matter where you live, you likely have access to an outside space," said Tiffany Lester, an integrative medicine doctor in San Francisco. "If it's not in your neighborhood, think of a close space you can get to within 10 to 30 minutes. Getting outside and away from our devices calms our nervous system from the negative effects of everyday stressors."

2. Clean and organize your living space.

When your apartment or office is a mess, it can take a toll on your mental state, making you feel more stressed, anxious and overwhelmed.

"For some, a messy or disorganized space can activate their nervous systems and impact mental health wellness," said therapist Jesse Kahn, director of The Gender & Sexuality Therapy Center in New York. "If that's you, taking time to clean up your space can be an act of self-care and self-love, and may feel healing rather than like a chore you don't want to do."

3. Reduce the amount of time you spend on social media.

Mindlessly scrolling through your social media feeds for hours on end is not only a time suck, but is also linked to lower self-esteem, sleep issues and an increased "fear of missing out," or FOMO.

"Social media and the internet is a great resource to connect, cultivate support and community, but it can also be a place of overconsumption, distraction, and numbing out to what we truly may need in our lives," said McKel Hill Kooienga, a registered dietitian in Nashville, Tennessee, and founder of the site Nutrition Stripped.

The iPhone's "Screen Time" feature, Android's "Digital Wellbeing" tools or apps like Moment can monitor your social media usage and help you cut back. Other tricks that may be useful include disabling certain push notifications, switching to grayscale mode or hiding your most enticing apps in a folder that's not on your home screen.

4. Do some journaling.

Journaling can be a very therapeutic (and inexpensive) exercise.

All you need is a pen and some paper to get started. Journaling can be a therapeutic practice that helps you understand thought patterns, work through difficult emotions, reflect on certain events or cultivate more gratitude in your everyday life.

"Sometimes I find it just as helpful as therapy — and I'm very pro-therapy; I'm studying to be a therapist," said Lauren Donelson, a writer and yoga teacher based in Seattle. "Journaling helps us externalize what's going on inside our heads, and it helps us to look at our thoughts more objectively."

5. Get better sleep.

Making an effort to get the recommended seven to nine hours of quality shuteye can make a huge difference when it comes to your overall wellbeing. Getting a good night's sleep on a consistent basis offers benefits such as better immune function, improved mood and better performance at work. (If you need some tips on how to make it happen, we've got you covered.)

"Maybe the self-care practice here is getting a certain number of hours a night, not exceeding a certain number of hours, getting to sleep by a certain time so you're able to wake up by a certain time or creating a ritual to help you calm your body, relax and go to sleep," Kahn said.

6. Meditate.

Practicing meditation is one of the best ways to restore and reconnect with our mind and body, said Tamara Levitt, a Toronto-based meditation instructor and head of mindfulness at Calm.

"As (writer) Anne Lamott said: 'Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes,'" Lamott said. "There is immense value in giving ourselves time and space to shift from 'doing' mode to 'being' mode. Meditation allows us to reconnect with the needs of our mind and body."

If you prefer guided meditations, you can check out the free version of apps like Headspace or Calm, or find videos on YouTube. And, of course, meditating in silence is another great option that doesn't cost a dime.

7. Check in with yourself.

At least once a day, if not more, take some time to check in with yourself. Pause to assess how hungry or full you are, any emotions you may be feeling or scan your body for areas of tightness.

"Simply asking yourself the question, 'How am I doing right now?' is a gentle reminder to take care of yourself," Hill Kooienga said.

8. Move your body.

You don't need to spend a lot on a gym membership to get moving.
It might be dancing in your bedroom to a fire playlist, doing squats in your living room or participating in a community yoga class (which is generally less costly than a boutique fitness class).

"However, if that still doesn't fit in your budget, there are many free online yoga videos on YouTube," Kahn said. "One of my favorites is Yoga With Adriene."

9. Connect with loved ones offline.

Texting and email are convenient forms of communication, but they don't satisfy our deep need for connection in the way more personal interactions do.

"Call a friend, take a walk with a colleague or cook dinner with a family member," Dahlen deVos said. "Connecting with others we care for helps to shift us out of our heads, regulates our nervous systems and elevates our moods."

10. Invest time in a hobby.

The demands of work, family and other obligations take up most of our time and energy, leaving barely any room in our schedules for activities we truly enjoy. But carving out some time for our hobbies — even when we have a lot on our plate — matters.

"Most of us are too busy to make time for activities that are joy-filled and feel nurturing," Levitt said. "Find a time each week to shut off your electronics, and engage in a hobby that

rejuvenates your spirit; play music, write in a journal, take a cooking class. While electronics deplete us, our favorite activities nourish us."

11. Take some deep breaths.

During high-stress periods, we may go hours or even a whole day without taking a full, grounding breath if we're not intentional about it.

"I like to take a few deep breaths in the morning and also throughout the day because it helps me to recenter and connect more with the present moment," said Jessica Jones, a San Francisco-based registered dietitian and co-founder of Food Heaven. "One strategy that I use to remind myself to do this is to take three deep breaths every time I go to the bathroom and wash my hands. It's easy, free and makes a huge difference in my daily stress levels."

12. Volunteer your time with an organization you care about.

Choose your cause, whatever it may be, and then figure out a way you can pitch in.

"Engaging in altruistic acts and seeing our actions make a direct and positive impact in the lives of others is a surefire way to shift your mood and feel part of something bigger than yourself," Dahlen deVos said. "This can help put our problems in context, or at least give us a break from stressors without numbing out."

13. Eat more vegetables.

Like your parents always told you, eat your vegetables.

Aim to put more of your grocery budget toward veggies and less towards ultra-processed snack foods. Then, to up your intake, cut up some vegetables at the beginning of the week and store them in your fridge — that way you can easily grab them when you need a snack or throw in a handful or two to spruce up your meals.

"Most of us are not consuming near enough whole foods let alone vegetables, which keep us nice and full because of prolonged satiety from the fiber," Hill Kooienga said. "Vegetables nourish our physical bodies on a cellular level with fiber, minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants, and they can taste really delicious too."

14. Cuddle with someone you love.

Snuggle up next to your partner, your child or even your BFF.

"Cuddling releases oxytocin, a feel good hormone, that also helps with reducing stress," said Lynsie Seely, a marriage and family therapist in San Francisco.

Pets make great cuddle buddies, too. Plus, spending time with our furry friends has been shown to alleviate anxiety, depression and feelings of loneliness.

"If you don't have access to a pet, go visit adoptable animals at the local shelter, sign up to walk dogs for a service such as WAG or sip tea at a cat cafe," Dahlen deVos said.

15. Say "no" more often.

We often think of self-care as doing something extra for ourselves on top of our normal day-to-day activities. But self-care can also be about what you choose not to do, Seely said.
One way to give a healthy "no"? Start setting boundaries with the people in your life.

"So many of us are people pleasers and spend a lot of time doing things out of feelings of guilt and obligation, causing us to feel energetically drained and lacking the ability to focus on ourselves and what we truly want," said Sara Groton, a nutrition and eating psychology coach in San Francisco. "Any time I find myself thinking 'I should do that or I have to do that,' I take a moment to question and challenge that thought."

16. Practice self-compassion.

All the face masks, manicures and massages in the world can't undo the damage of that harsh inner voice criticizing, judging and berating yourself all day long.

If you don't know where to begin with self-compassion, Allison Hart — a mental health professional in San Francisco — recommended putting your hand over your heart and saying to yourself: "I am struggling right now. I'm in pain, I'm angry or feeling out of the flow. May I be gentle and flexible with myself. May I be kind to myself and may I take a break from problem-solving just for a moment."

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cheap-self-care-practices-low-cost-budget_l_5e3b4ae0c5b6f1f57f0ababe