



## **A 5-Step Approach for Creating (and Getting Into) a Self-Care Routine**

**Follow these five steps to adopt a sustainable self-care practice.**

## Step 1

Find what makes you feel centered. Gill Lopez, who leads self-care workshops for students, professional groups, and community groups, says she exposes participants to different types of self-care because one size doesn't fit all. "I go through all different kinds of things that might appeal to people in hopes that they'll find something they can do on a regular basis," Gill Lopez says. Start by writing down as many things as you can think of that bring you joy, whether it's the color purple, receiving back rubs, springtime, certain smells, or essential oils.

## Step 2

Brainstorm how you can incorporate those things into your daily life. It could be in the background (such as filling your space with the colors and smells you enjoy) or it could take up a more prominent space in your daily routine (such as designating a set amount of time for a certain activity), Gill Lopez says. Starting small may make the habit easier to get into. "Pick one behavior that you would like to make part of your routine for the next week," Courtney says.

## Step 3

Set goals for incorporating self-care behaviors every day. Once you decide what self-care practices you'd like to incorporate into your life, come up with goals for how often and when. Make your goal realistic and measurable, Gill Lopez writes in a 2017 article published in the National Association of School Psychologists Communique. (1) For instance, if you're trying to unplug from electronic devices in order to be more present, start with a short amount of time, like 20 minutes during dinner. When you successfully stick to that for a week, you can set a more challenging goal.

## Step 4

After seven days, evaluate. Once you've completed a seven-day streak, Courtney says to reflect on how you're feeling and note any positive benefits. "Use this as fuel to maintain the behavior throughout the month," she says.

## Step 5

Adjust and tweak your approach as you go. It's okay if there are bumps along the way. "We're talking about a practice, we're talking about trial and error, and we're also talking about our needs changing over time," says Ellen K. Baker, PhD, a psychologist based in Washington, DC. "What might be self-care in one period might be less so in another period."

Some examples of easy-to-adopt self-care practices include: reading a book to your toddler (or yourself) every night; taking a 10-minute walk outside; going to sleep earlier; powering down your devices in the evening; cooking with more nutritious ingredients; and surrounding yourself with things that make you happy.

