



# Well-Being Program

## Guide to Self-Care

### A Well-Being Support Guide Created for You

The ACR® is committed to supporting your well-being. Guides like these, created by fellow radiologists, are designed to help identify activities that may enhance your well-being and mitigate burnout.

### About Self-Care

Self-care has become a popular term that is part of the prescription for successfully preventing burnout and living a life of wellness. But what does this really mean and is it realistically achievable? Self-care is different for everyone, so although it is commonly prescribed, the prescription itself is highly individualized.

As physicians, we entered a unique set of life circumstances when we began medical school. There was an unsaid understanding that we would be conceding time and life opportunities for the noble pursuit of medicine. We became accustomed to giving up time at the gym and with friends and missing life events because we needed to study or be at work. As our training continued, so did these concessions. They persisted even after training ended, when family and career responsibilities replaced other duties.

We know there is a level of self-care we need to subscribe to for a healthy and happy life, though it can be daunting when we look at our schedules and lists of things to do. When going to a yoga class means spending even less time with your family, preventing you from taking care of your house and a stack of bills on your desk, is it really worth the hour of stretching? The pressure of pursuing wellness then becomes a source of unwellness. By not pursuing wellness, you are contributing to your own burnout, and this becomes a vicious circle.

Despite the sometimes cliché nature of how self-care is represented, it is an important component of being healthy and happy that we can control. It is certainly not the cure for burnout, but self-care allows us to take steps that may help mitigate difficult emotions. The purpose of this guide is to simplify self-care into the most achievable components.

### How to Use This Guide

This guide consists of two components. The first part includes elements of self-care that are **fundamental** to living a healthy life and are important for everyone. The second part includes suggestions that will be more individualized and nuanced in their effects. If you feel compelled to make changes in your life, try several methods to see what works best.

## PART I – The Fundamentals

### Sleep

It is a badge of honor to be someone who “doesn’t need sleep” in medicine. This is a terrible misconception that has harmful effects, both short- and long-term. Matthew Walker, PhD, discusses his very important research on sleep and why we need **7–9** hours of rest every night in the following two resources:

1. [TED Talk: Sleep is Your Superpower — 19 minutes](#)
2. [Podcast: Ten Percent Happier With Dan Harris, Episode #221, All of Your Sleep Questions Answered](#)

## Nutrition

Nutrition is necessary for health and growth. Healthy nutrition does not need to be overwhelming, nor does it necessitate adhering to a diet. Nutrition is part of the medical school curriculum. We know about the basic tenets of eating healthy, the science behind it and why it is important. Realistic goals are essential with nutrition. Indulgences shouldn't be forbidden, but limited. How we eat can be incredibly difficult to change, but small changes can make big differences.

Here are 10 simple steps:

1. [Article: 10 Simple Ways to Start Eating Healthier This Year](#) — 15 minutes
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## Exercise

As physicians, we also know that exercise is important for a healthy life. Recently, studies have shown that sitting all day (hello, radiologists!), has a significant negative impact on health. Exercise can be difficult to incorporate into an already busy schedule. "It only takes 30 minutes" can often be unrealistic if one needs to drive to the gym or coordinate childcare. Strategic planning to incorporate exercise into your weekly schedule may require some creative maneuvering, so try different methods and see what works best. The most important part is building consistency through small successes.

1. [Article: Physical Activity and Adults](#) — 2 minutes
  2. [Article: Sitting Time and All-Cause Mortality Risk in 222,497 Australian Adults](#) — 20 minutes
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## Relationships

Humans are social beings. We are programmed to need deep and meaningful social interactions and relationships. Work and life can be hard and wonderful — and everything in between. Sharing those moments with someone else you connect with and trust is essential for mental well-being.

1. [Article: 15 Reasons We Need Friends](#) — 5 minutes
  2. [TED Talk: A Hilarious Celebration of Lifelong Female Friendship](#) — 15 minutes
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## Compassion

Give yourself and others a break. Perfectionism is an unattainable goal. Mistakes are unavoidable, so give them space in your life that doesn't involve shame.

1. [TED Talk: Want a Happier Life? Be More Compassionate](#) — 15 minutes
  2. [TED Talk: Our Dangerous Obsession With Perfectionism Is Getting Worse](#) — 15 minutes
  3. [TED Talk: Don't Suffer From Your Depression in Silence](#) — 6 minutes
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# PART II — Personalizing Your Self-Care

## Mindfulness

Often used as a therapeutic technique in a variety of fields including the military, mindfulness is about being aware of your current mental and physical state and calmly accepting any feelings or thoughts. Our world is full of concurrent distractions and we can easily forget to focus on the present.

1. [Article: Mechanisms of Mindfulness](#) — 20 minutes
2. [TED Talk: How to Tame Your Wandering Mind](#) — 18 minutes
3. [TED Talk: The Unforeseen Consequences of a Fast-Paced World](#) — 9 minutes
4. [TED Talk: In Praise of Slowness](#) — 19 minutes
5. [Book: Fully Present: The Science, Art, and Practice of Mindfulness](#), by Diana Winston and Susan Smalley

## Meditation

Meditation is similar to mindfulness, but not exactly interchangeable. While mindfulness specifically refers to the state of being aware, meditation refers to a specific practice of focusing within. Practicing meditation can increase mindfulness. Meditation can be a hard stop for many western medicine physicians because it sounds too hokey or contrary for our desire to be fast, driven and competitive. We often think that we will be “bad” at meditation because our minds are always racing and impossible to keep still. Dan Harris’ book *10% Happier* describes meditation as an “exercise for the mind” because it is simply recognizing that your thoughts have drifted and to bring them back to the present, even if you have to do it 1,000 times. There is no goal for meditation, but for goal-oriented physicians, perhaps the sight should be set on gaining equanimity.

1. [Audiobook: 10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works — A True Story, by Dan Harris](#)
  2. [Book: The Untethered Soul, by Michael A. Singer](#)
  3. [App: Happier](#)
  4. [App: Calm](#) (discount for physicians)
  5. [App: Headspace](#) (discount for AMA members)
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## Gratitude Journal

Multiple studies have shown that practicing gratitude positively impacts mental health and resilience. While journaling may not be for everyone, it can be a way to promote consistency in the practice of gratitude.

1. [Article: Gratitude as a Psychotherapeutic Intervention — 20 minutes](#)
  2. [Article: Greater Good in Action, How to Start a Gratitude Journal — 5 minutes](#)
  3. [TED Talk: Want to Be Happy? Be Grateful — 14 minutes](#)
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## Other Self-Care Suggestions

Multiple studies have shown that practicing gratitude positively impacts mental health and resilience. While journaling may not be for everyone, it can be a way to promote consistency in the practice of gratitude.

1. Reading for joy.
2. Getting outdoors.
3. Finding things you enjoy doing.
4. Finding things that challenge you.
5. Getting therapy.
6. Allowing yourself to completely relax.