



## Self-care tips for Allied Health Professionals

### What is self-care, and why do we need it?

Self-care is any activity that we do deliberately to take care of our mental, emotional, and/or physical health. It's something we have to plan in advance and make a priority. We should aim to complete acts of self-care every day.

### How do I know if I need (more) self-care?

Self-care needs to be prioritised in order to have a reasonable work-life balance. However, sometimes we need to practice more self-care than usual. If you're lacking pleasure in work, making more errors than usual, not "switching off" at the end of the day, or feeling increasingly irritable or reactive, you may need to invest in an extra dose of self-care.

Sometimes when we don't prioritise self-care, our busy lives can make us feel depressed, anxious, or suicidal. If this is the case for you, please talk to someone about it. You can seek help from your GP, and they may provide you with a Mental Health Care Plan for a psychologist. Alternatively, you can contact Lifeline (13 11 14) or Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636).

### So, what kind of self-care should I practice?

#### Self-care strategies for work

**Touch base with your work mates** – Whether you're working from home or still at the office, touch base with your colleagues to see how everyone's doing and share some of your experiences. Perhaps you could share a coffee over Zoom or go for a walk together on your lunch break.

**Talk to your manager or supervisor** - Talking to a manager or supervisor is a great way to manage your workload to avoid feeling 'burnt out'. You might also be able to use your time during the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect and expand on your skills and practices.

**Reflect** – Take note of how your workday is going. Give yourself praise for what you've done well, evaluate any unresolved feelings about what has happened at work, and think about what you might do differently next time.

**Re-structure your day** – Face-to-face consultations are currently being put on hold, and we are now spending up to 8 hours in front of a computer! This can be exhausting and may take some time to adjust to, so you might consider changing your schedule. Maybe you're an early bird who is more efficient in the morning, or perhaps you need more time between sessions. Structure your day in a way that works for you.

**Leave work in one place** – If you're working from home, designate one area in which to complete your work. If you're still at the office, don't bring work home. Write yourself a to-do list for tomorrow – you need time away from work!

**Set boundaries** – Our work lives are changing, and our boundaries need to change with them. If you're feeling tired or overwhelmed, it is OK to say NO to additional work demands. This does not make you a bad employee or employer – it makes you a more efficient worker. Saying 'no' to additional work means you're likely to make less mistakes and feel more confident and motivated in your work.

#### Self-care strategies for life beyond work

**Avoid being isolated** – Isolation can lead to a whole range of emotions. Whilst living with restrictions, it's important that you still have access to your support systems. Isolation can increase symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression.

Determine which supports are available for you now. Organise a Zoom or Facetime call, or plan to meet with someone whilst still adhering to physical distancing requirements. If you don't have someone to talk to, call a mental health hotline or book an appointment with a psychologist to stay connected and improve your mood.



**Continue with your hobbies and stay active** – Gyms and retail stores may be closed, but that doesn't mean we can't engage with our hobbies. Think about what activities you enjoy, or what new hobbies you're interested in, and bring joy back into your day! It is extremely important for us to keep active and get fresh air as often as we can. Exercise is a great way to improve your mood.

**Get mindful** – Mindfulness is about being present in the moment and helps us to focus on the NOW. Practicing mindfulness can help us to reduce stress and anxiety, increase concentration, and better regulate our emotions. There are many resources available online, including the free Smiling Mind app.

**Sleep, eat well and relax** – Maintaining good sleeping and eating patterns is very important during this time (and always). Sleeping and eating well helps us to remain focused at work, motivated and optimistic. We also need to be able to relax without feeling guilty. Taking some time to slow down is important for your health. Listen to your body – if you need that extra hour of sleep, or you need to take a break from housework, do it!

**Practice self-compassion** – Self-compassion is an alternative to self-criticism. When things don't go the way we had hoped, it's easy to blame ourselves. When we aren't coping in the way we'd like, or achieving the results we'd like, self-criticism can make things harder. Instead, ask yourself: What would I say to a close friend in this situation? Have other people I admire experienced similar challenges? What can I learn from them? What do I *really* need right now? Pleasure? Boundaries? Bravery? Act kindly toward yourself and pursue what you need.

**Find time for laughter and play** – Laughter and play can be easy to dismiss, even at times when we need them most. Learn about what makes you laugh and find ways to bring play into your day.

## Possible signs you need to re-prioritise self-care

Are you experiencing any of the following?

- Difficulties getting to sleep, or waking in the night more than usual
- Changes to eating patterns/ weight change
- Increased irritability at home with family or friends
- Somatic symptoms – e.g. headaches, neck pain, abdominal pains, dehydration etc.
- You don't look forward to anything and don't enjoy the things that you previously enjoyed
- You're getting sick frequently
- You feel tired all the time
- You want to be alone more than usual and stop responding to other's requests to socialise (even online!)
- Restlessness and increased agitation or "nervous energy"
- Increased drinking and/or smoking

If you answered 'yes' to more than 2 of these signs, it's time to make self-care a priority. If you answered 'yes' to more than 4 of these symptoms, consider seeking professional help in order to make self-care a priority.