# Pine River Library Program in a Bag:
Self-Care

What is Self-Care?

The World Health Organization defines self-care as "the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider".

Self-care encompasses a broad range of factors, both personal and social:

- Hygiene: personal and also that of your surroundings
- Nutrition
- Lifestyle: exercise, rest, living conditions, social habits
- Attitude: self-reliance, empowerment, responsibility
- Community: involvement and participation
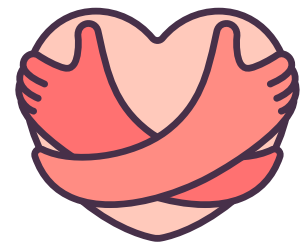
Self-Care in the Time of COVID-19

Self-care is NOT selfish. In these unprecedented times we need to focus on what nourishes us even more than ever. Here are a few ideas to help get you through the coming months of the pandemic. Many of these suggestions seem basic, but the science behind these actions is clear. Give yourself little daily reminders to incorporate these practices into your life!

- **Sleep!** Getting more sleep improves your immune system and helps fight stress. Try going to bed 30 minutes earlier than usual.
- **Work Out!** Exercise sharpens focus, releases endorphins (hormones that make you feel great), and aids sleep. One of the silver linings of the pandemic is that a quick internet search will bring up a plethora of free at home workouts, many of which require no equipment!
- **Get Silly!** If it makes you feel like a kid again, great! Play in any form can trigger a rush of positive neurochemicals like serotonin, oxytocin, and dopamine. Even one minute of fun has been shown to have positive effects!
- **Eat Smart!** Did you know that certain foods can actually reduce stress? Warm foods like soup and tea are soothing and calming. Fatty fish like salmon and sardines have omega-3s that can improve your mood. Avocados have plenty of Vitamin C and B6, which are proven to reduce stress levels. And of course, there are "healthy" sweet treats as well- antioxidant rich dark chocolate is a known stress buster (in moderation of course). Whole grains, bananas, oranges, and leafy greens like kale can all help in your quest for calm. Oh and don't forget, plain old water!!!!

- **Listen to Music!** Play your old favorites or discover new artists! Studies have shown that music can lessen symptoms of mental problems like anxiety and depression while also lifting self-esteem. Extra points if you add in a dance break- that can check the box for "getting silly" too!
- **Take a Bath!** Why is a soak so relaxing? According to a a study in the December 2018 Journal of Applied Physiology, just one hot bath can lessen our body's stress response, mainly by reducing inflammation.
- **Stay Social!** There's plenty of research showing that social interactions improve mental and physical health- they can even lead to a longer life! A 2017 study published in the journal of the American Psychological Association found that quality relationships and social connections are so closely associated with a variety of benefits that cultivating these kinds of relationships should be considered a public health priority!
- **Get Creative!** Creative activities like drawing, coloring, painting, and knitting etc. can be great relaxing outlets for many. They provide opportunities to tune out the rest of the world and focus on one thing. These activities are also an excellent way to express your emotions.
- **Garden!** Grow some plants, indoors or outdoors! Many studies have proven the mental health advantages of gardening. The act of caring for the plants provides a beneficial level of engagement and the plants also provide the same benefits humans receive from interacting with nature.
- **Give a Pet Some Love!** Playing with and caring for pets can help ease anxiety. Evidence shows that playing with animals can help reduce stress, inspire good feelings, boost energy, and even increase how "socially supported" people feel.
- **Get Organized!** It really is the "Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up." According to the Mayo Clinic, clutter can increase stress and anxiety; when people describe their spaces as "disorganized," they're more likely to have higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Feeling stressed? Try taking just 15 minutes to organize a messy part of your home — even if it's just cleaning up a "junk drawer."
- **Laugh!** The heath and happiness benefits of laughing are clear. In the moment, you increase your intake of oxygen-rich air, which helps your muscles, lungs, and heart. You're also releasing endorphins, those feel-good hormones. Research has showed that humor and laughter can even improve your immune function by helping you produce antibodies and activate the body's protective T-cells.
- **Use Social Media Mindfully!** The more personal your social media interactions, the better, experts say. Don't just scroll through; instead, take time to connect with friends directly. Be selective about who you follow and take time to disconnect!

- **Don't Overdo News!** In these times when the news can increase our anxiety levels with just a few headlines, experts recommend limiting your news to two or three sources a day and checking in at regular times throughout the day for updates rather than staying plugged in continuously.
- **Stretch!** A full workout is always great, but did you know that taking just a few moments to take a break and move your body is helpful too? The switch of stopping what you are doing and refocusing your energy is beneficial for the mind and your body will thank you for even a few moments of movement!
- **Get outside!** A 2019 study from *Frontiers in Psychology* shows that spending just 20 minutes outside in nature can help lower stress hormone levels. Time of day and specific settings didn't change the results- so take a little walk or sit beneath a tree in your yard- just get outside and enjoy!

This kit contains:
- All natural bath bombs for a soothing soak
- Dark chocolate for an antioxidant boost
- Stress-busting tea with calming lavender and chamomile
- Coloring pages for a stress-busting art session

Sources:
- https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/definitions/en/
- https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/top-self-care-tips-for-being-stuck-at-home-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
- https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/a-20-minute-nature-break-relieves-stress