

## Is your lifestyle causing you stress?

The way you live your life can have a big impact on your health, well-being, and how well or poorly you handle stress. Below are lifestyle behaviors that affect stress levels. Please check the boxes that apply to you. Doing an honest assessment of how well or poorly you take care of yourself can help you manage your stress in the future.

Lifestyle Behaviors			
When you are under stress, do you:	Yes	No	When you are under stress, do you:
Smoke/use tobacco	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Engage in physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes each day
Drink a lot of coffee or caffeinated drinks (more than 2-3 cups per day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get six to eight hours of sleep every night
Drink alcohol (more than recommended levels of 1-2 per day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain good eating habits
Overuse over-the-counter medications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make time to relax
Overeat or under eat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain a sense of humor
Spend too much money (e.g., do you have a lot of credit card debt and have trouble making payments?)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Play
Abuse/overuse tranquilizers or other over-the-counter medications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintain healthy rituals and routines
Watch too much television (more than 3-4 hours per day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Be optimistic. Engage in positive thinking
Have angry outbursts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spend time with family
Take illegal drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spend time with friends
Withdraw from people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make plans for the future
Ignore or deny stress symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Figure out ways to manage stress
Engage in self-destructive relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reward yourself for your accomplishments
<b>These are negative self-care behaviors.</b>		<b>These are positive self-care behaviors.</b>	

(Source: Unknown)

## Self-Care Assessment

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. Norton.

The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:

- 3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)
- 2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)
- 1 = I barely or rarely do this
- 0 = I never do this
- ? = This never occurred to me

### Physical Self-Care

- \_\_\_ Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- \_\_\_ Eat healthily
- \_\_\_ Exercise
- \_\_\_ Get regular medical care for prevention
- \_\_\_ Get medical care when needed
- \_\_\_ Take time off when sick
- \_\_\_ Get massages
- \_\_\_ Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
- \_\_\_ Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner
- \_\_\_ Get enough sleep
- \_\_\_ Wear clothes I like
- \_\_\_ Take vacations
- \_\_\_ Other:

### Psychological Self-Care

- \_\_\_ Take day trips or mini-vacations
- \_\_\_ Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
- \_\_\_ Make time for self-reflection
- \_\_\_ Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- \_\_\_ Have my own personal psychotherapy
- \_\_\_ Write in a journal
- \_\_\_ Read literature that is unrelated to work
- \_\_\_ Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- \_\_\_ Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- \_\_\_ Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre
- \_\_\_ Be curious

- \_\_\_\_\_ Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

### **Emotional Self-Care**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stay in contact with important people in my life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Love myself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow myself to cry
- \_\_\_\_\_ Find things that make me laugh
- \_\_\_\_\_ Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

### **Spiritual Self-Care**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Make time for reflection
- \_\_\_\_\_ Spend time in nature
- \_\_\_\_\_ Find a spiritual connection or community
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be open to inspiration
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cherish my optimism and hope
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- \_\_\_\_\_ Be open to not knowing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meditate
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pray
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have experiences of awe
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contribute to causes in which I believe
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

### **Relationship Self-Care**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- \_\_\_\_\_ Schedule regular activities with my children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make time to see friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Call, check on, or see my relatives
- \_\_\_\_\_ Spend time with my companion animals
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stay in contact with faraway friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow others to do things for me
- \_\_\_\_\_ Enlarge my social circle
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ask for help when I need it
- \_\_\_\_\_ Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

**Workplace or Professional Self-Care**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take time to chat with co-workers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make quiet time to complete tasks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- \_\_\_\_\_ Set limits with clients and colleagues
- \_\_\_\_\_ Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is "too much"
- \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Get regular supervision or consultation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have a peer support group
- \_\_\_\_\_ (If relevant) Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest

**Overall Balance**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

**Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You**

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[http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self\\_care\\_assess.shtml](http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self_care_assess.shtml) and adapted by Lisa D. Butler, Ph.D.)

## My Maintenance Self-Care Worksheet

Review the Self-Care Assessment that you just completed, which includes what you are doing now for self-care. On this maintenance self-care worksheet, list those activities that you engage in regularly (like every day or week) under “current practice” within each domain. Identify new strategies that you would like to begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance self-care— pay particular attention to domains that you have not been addressing in the past. On the last page identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care, how you will address them, and any negative coping strategies you would like to target for change and how you will change them.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>MIND</u></b></p> <p><b>Current practice</b></p>    <p><b>New practice</b></p>    	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>BODY</u></b></p> <p><b>Current practice</b></p>    <p><b>New practice</b></p>    
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>EMOTIONS</u></b></p> <p><b>Current practice</b></p>    <p><b>New practice</b></p>    	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>SPIRIT</u></b></p> <p><b>Current practice</b></p>    <p><b>New practice</b></p>    

**My Maintenance Self-Care Worksheet**

<p><b><u>WORK</u></b></p> <p>Current practice</p> <p>New practice</p>	<p><b><u>RELATIONSHIPS</u></b></p> <p>Current practice</p> <p>New practice</p>
<p><b><u>OTHER: _____.</u></b></p> <p>Current practice</p> <p>New practice</p>	<p><b><u>OTHER: _____.</u></b></p> <p>Current practice</p> <p>New practice</p>

## **My Maintenance Self-Care Worksheet**

<b>Barriers to maintaining my self-care strategies</b>	<b>How I will address these barriers and remind myself to practice self-care</b>
<b>Negative coping strategies I would like to use less or not at all</b>	<b>What I will do instead</b>

(Adapted by Shirley Reiser, LCSW and Lisa D. Butler, PhD from materials provided by Sandra A. Lopez, LCSW, ACSW, University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work.)

## Emergency Self-Care Worksheet

*Why do I need to do this?* It is very hard to think of what to do for yourself when things get tough. It is best to **have a plan ready** for when you need it.

*What should be in it?* You need to consider 3 general areas: what to do, what to think, and what to avoid.

### 1. Make a list of what you can do when you are upset that will be good for you.

a. What will help me relax? \_\_\_\_\_

For example,

- Breathing, Muscle relaxation, Music
- Reading for fun, watching a movie
- Exercising, Taking a walk

b. What do I like to do when I'm in a good mood? \_\_\_\_\_

- List all the things you like to do so you remember what they are when you need to think of something to do.

c. What can I do that will help me throughout the day? \_\_\_\_\_

For example,

- Avoid too much caffeine if feeling anxious
- Remember to breathe
- Watch my thoughts
- Stay in the moment

d. Other: What else do YOU need to do that is specific to YOU?

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**2. Make a list of people you can contact if you need support or distraction.**

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For example, your best friend, other friends, sibling, parent, grandparent, other relative, therapist, priest/minister/rabbi/imam, etc.

**a. Divide the list of people into categories by asking yourself the following questions:**

- Who can I call if I am feeling depressed or anxious?
- Who can I call if I am lonely?
- Who will come over to be with me if I need company?
- Who will listen?
- Who will encourage me to get out of the house and do something fun?
- Who will remind me to follow my self-care plan?
- Other:

**3. Next, make a list of positive things to say to yourself when you are giving yourself a hard time.**

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Examples of negative self-talk:

- "I got a B- on the paper; that proves that I shouldn't be in graduate school." CHANGE to: "That is a good grade. I will work on getting a better one."
- "I do not understand research methods, I am so dumb." CHANGE to: "A lot of students are having a problem with this course. Maybe we should start a study group to help each other."
- "I can't get all this work done. I should just drop out." CHANGE to: "I will develop a schedule so that I can get this all done." "I can check with other students for ideas." "I can get some feedback from the professors that might help me do the assignments."

You get it. Try to think about what you would say to a client with the same struggles and apply it to yourself.

**4. Next, make a list of who and what to avoid when you are having a hard time.**

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Examples of people to avoid:

- My boy(girl)friend broke up with me. I will not call my sister as she always hated him. She'll be happy he's gone.
- I didn't get my assignment in on time and I'm worried about my grade. I will not call my dad. He is a stickler for doing things in advance so that they are never late. He'll just give me a hard time.
- I am discouraged about my grades. I won't call my best friend because she'll just tell me not to worry about it and to quit school if it's such a hassle.

You get this too. Not everyone can be supportive or helpful with every situation. Go to the ones who can be supportive about the specific issue you are dealing with.

Examples of things to avoid:

- I should not stay in the house all day.
- I should not stay in bed all day.
- I should open the shades and let the light in.
- I should not listen to sad music.
- I should not drink too much alcohol.
- Other:

Again, you get it.

**5. Write this plan on a 3x5" card. Keep it in your purse/wallet (and on your phone if you can). Look at it often. Add any good ideas to it whenever you can. USE IT!**

(Prepared by Elaine S. Rinfrette, PhD, LCSW-R)