

7 Self-Care Tips That Will Make You Happier **Health** Summer

Refresh, recharge, and score more summertime me time.

BARBARA BRODY June 05, 2018

Practicing self care is something you should be doing 365 days a year. But we get it—sometimes work, relationships, and everyday hassles take up all your free time. Now that summer is approaching, however, incorporating self-care into your routine has become a little bit easier.

Vacation days give you breaks in your routine, warmer weather allows for more outdoors time, and summer's carefree, slow-mo vibe means fewer distractions from giving yourself the TLC you need and deserve. "Self-care may mean different things to different people, but I consider it anything that you do to make yourself feel and function at your best," says Mia Finkelston, MD, a family physician who treats patients via the telehealth app LiveHealth Online.

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Give your physical and mental health a boost this season by embracing these simple, restorative self-care moves.

Try a workout switch

If you're not already very active—or feel a bit bored by your current routine—this is the time to commit to a new exercise plan. "Since the mornings are bright, consider exercising or bike riding first thing, either alone or with a friend," says Finkelston. Or delve into an activity you love that doesn't quite feel like exercise, such as gardening. The combo of a fresh experience and some physical movement is sure to re-energize you.

Clean house

Take 5-10 minutes a day to tidy up a part of your home you spend much of your time in. What sounds like a chore will actually help dial back stress and make you feel more comfortable in your space. That's because clutter in your house can translate into mental clutter, weighing you down and potentially increasing anxiety and depression. Organizing and cleaning, however, help you feel less overwhelmed, like you've come out from under.

Splurge on new summer gear

Tidying your home up also means purging things you don't want or need. With this in mind, Finkleston suggests changing out your bedding—no need for a heavy comforter this time of year!—and donating old clothing to a local charity. If your budget allows it, treat yourself to summer-themed items that make you feel well and good. New sandals and shades, perhaps?

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Get out of town... or plan a staycation

Whether it's a beach weekend or a trip abroad, vacation is all about resetting and refueling. "Taking a vacation can reduce stress and may also lower cortisol levels, which decreases the risk of heart disease," says Finkelston. "Meanwhile, the experiences you have while traveling, especially if you are discovering new places and interacting with different people, translate to knowledge, and exercising your brain is an extremely important part of maintaining your overall health."

If you're strapped for cash, don't underestimate the power of a staycation. The key to making the most of it is to seek out novel experiences—even though you'll be crashing at home. Explore local hiking trails, head to the nearby zoo or museum you haven't visited in years, and visit farmers' markets and local fairs, where you can treat yourself to nourishing foods or just feel like a kid again.

Soak up some sun

After you wake in the morning, open your blinds and bask in bright sunshine for a few minutes. Sounds so simple, but numerous studies have shown that sunlight is a happiness and energy booster.

One study, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, looked at data of more than 16,000 adults over a six-year period and found that people have less mental distress when there are more sunny days. That shouldn't be too surprising, considering that sunlight helps promote the production of serotonin, a feel-good mood chemical in your brain. Morning sun can also help reset your circadian rhythms so you feel more alert during the day and sleep better at night.

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Indulge in summer beach reads

Losing yourself in any book lets you escape your routine and becoming absorbed in a totally different world. But hey, it's summer, so give yourself permission to dispense with the biographies or heavy literature and indulge in the season's best beach reads—the ones that may be too light or trashy to make the cut for your book club yet are thoroughly satisfying guilty pleasures.

If you can read while lying on a towel in the sand, sitting on a park bench, or flopping in a hammock in your backyard, that's even better. Studies have shown that spending time in nature is a reliable stress reliever.

Make time for afternoon naps

Summer is siesta time, and nothing qualifies as self care quite like a restoring, energizing nap, even if for only 20 minutes. If that's not possible or you're not the type who can just nod off so easily, score some of the same benefits by spending a few minutes breathing deeply and meditating, suggests Finkelston.