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Exercise as self-care?

What you need to know

Self-care. You probably hear about it all the time — on TV, in magazines, and on social media.

It may bring to mind images of meditation, bubble baths, and silent retreats. But one important form of self-care is something you may already be doing: exercise.

Going for a walk? Self-care. Hitting the gym? Self-care. Pilates? Biking? Taking the stairs? You get the idea.

Here, we answer some of the questions you may have about exercise as self-care.

Why does it count as self-care?

The definition of self-care, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, is “taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health.” Exercise fits the bill!

Specifically, exercise helps you by:

- Boosting your mood
- Reducing anxiety
- Improving your resilience
- Lowering your risk for diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers
- Making everyday activities easier to do

Which exercises should you do?

When choosing an **exercise plan** that’s right for you, consider:

- **Are you active now?** Going from sedentary to marathon training may lead to injury.
- **What’s your health history?** Certain conditions, like high blood pressure or past injuries, might raise your exercise-related risk. Check with your doctor before getting started.

What exercises and facilities are available to you?

Not everyone can afford a gym. Look for activities that don’t need much equipment. And check out local resources, like **Shape Up NYC**. This free program offers classes like Yoga, Circuit Training, Zumba, Soca Sweat Dance Fitness, and much more.

What if you can’t or don’t want to work out?

Try other forms of self-care, such as meditating or taking a bubble bath.

But exercise is one of the most beneficial forms of self-care for most people. And even small acts of self-care every day can add up to a big impact.

A little exercise goes a long way!

Got 10 minutes? Even short amounts of physical activity can improve your health. To learn more, [click here](#).



How your sleep habits affect your blood pressure

Do you find yourself staying up late, waking at odd hours, or sleeping in on weekends?

Inconsistent sleep might not seem like a big deal, but a new study has raised an alarm about shifting sleep schedules.

People with bigger differences in the amount of sleep they got each night — or in what time they went to bed — had a greater risk for high blood pressure, a condition with serious consequences.

For example, if you delay your bedtime by as little as 34 minutes, you'll increase your chance of high blood pressure by 32%.

Why sleep schedules matter

Your body keeps an internal clock that controls your metabolism, the release of your hormones, and other aspects of your health.

When you move your sleep times around, your internal clock can slip out of sync. This changes the way your body controls blood pressure, among other important functions. Not getting enough sleep could make it harder to concentrate, lower your energy, and increase the chances for heart disease and cancer.

On the flip side, a steadier sleep schedule keeps things aligned.

Things that keep you awake

Stress, medical issues, or sleep disorders, such as **sleep apnea** or insomnia, can interfere with steady slumber.

Scrolling on social media or bingeing your favorite show might keep you up later. Light from screens can interfere with sleep hormones, further disrupting your rest.

In addition, many people who work overnight or early morning shifts have trouble sleeping enough, or regularly.

Reset your body clock

Even if you can't control your job or other factors, you can try these tips:

- **Stay consistent.** Keep your bedtime and wake-up time about the same, even on your days off. Aim for seven to eight hours of rest.
- **Make changes slowly.** Adjust your bedtime by about 15 to 20 minutes each night.
- **Wind down.** Turn off your screens at least 30 minutes before bed. Take a bath, read a book, or meditate instead.
- **Create a healthy sleep space.** Keep your bedroom cool and quiet. Use light-blocking shades or curtains, especially if you sleep during the day.

Struggling with sleep?

Talk with your doctor to find out if a **sleep study** would help.

Treating a child's symptoms without medicine

When your child has a cough or fever, it's only natural that you want to help them feel better. If it were you who was under the weather, you might reach for an over-the-counter (OTC) medication. But for kids, certain OTC medicines can be dangerous. So how can you help your little one find relief until their illness goes away?

Why not OTC medications?

Some OTC medicines can have serious side effects for children, such as slowed breathing. This is particularly true with cold and cough medications. It's possible for kids to accidentally overdose if they get more than the recommended dose or take the medicine too often.

The FDA does not recommend giving children younger than age 2 any OTC medicines that treat cold or cough symptoms. The American Academy of Pediatrics cautions against these medicines for anyone younger than age 6. But even if your kids are older, talk with their pediatrician before giving them a medication, especially for the first time.

How to treat a cold

Medicines don't make a cold go away any faster — they just ease the symptoms. Fortunately, there are other ways to help kids feel more comfortable when they're sick. They include:

- **Fluids.** Drinking plenty of liquids keeps your kids hydrated. This thins the body's mucus, making it easier for them to cough and blow their nose. Plus, warm beverages can soothe sore throats.
- **Nasal suctioning with a bulb syringe.** This is a great way to clear a runny nose for children younger than 1 year old. Encourage older kids to blow their nose.
- **A cool-mist humidifier.** Using this machine can lessen congestion and help kids breathe better. (Avoid warm-mist humidifiers, which can cause nasal passages to swell.)
- **Saline nose drops or spray.** These products keep the inside of the nose moist, which helps avoid stuffiness. Or if your child's already congested, use drops or spray to loosen up dried mucus. Then, have them blow their nose.

Don't forget your flu shot

Help prevent the flu this fall by getting a flu shot. All people ages 6 months and older should get a flu shot every year. Look for a flu vaccination site [here](#).

Help your child cope with gun violence

Violent crimes affect more than just the individuals involved. A new study points out the mental health harms to kids who live close to shootings.

In the weeks afterward, children whose homes were within three blocks of a shooting incident were more likely to visit the emergency department for **mental health** reasons.

Most children recover well from stressful situations, including exposure to violence. But in some cases, problems that aren't addressed can affect a child's long-term health and development.

Respond quickly in a crisis

Many children are exposed to gun violence. In one study, one in eight teens had witnessed a shooting. Emotions like fear, anger, grief, and anxiety are normal afterward. But other feelings are more serious. Signs of a psychiatric emergency include:

- Saying, aloud or online, that they want to kill themselves
- Cutting or hurting their bodies
- Discussing plans to kill someone else, or threatening them with a weapon
- Acting destructively, such as starting fires or hurting animals

Call **911** if your child is in immediate danger. For suicide risk, you can call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or **800.273.TALK (800.273.8255)** or text "TALK" to **741741**. Also, remove any weapons from your home, and secure medicine in a locked cabinet.



When trauma lingers

Changes in mood and behavior should pass within four to six weeks. If they don't, your child may have a more complex condition, such as **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**.

Symptoms include:

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares and trouble sleeping
- Being on high alert for other threats
- Appearing helpless, hopeless, or withdrawn

- Avoiding people or places linked to the violence
- On the flip side, denying that it happened

If you spot any of these symptoms, or have any concerns about your child's response to a traumatic event, seek help.

Behavioral health support

MetroPlusHealth offers services and programs for children. To learn more, **click here**.



Beat the bloat:

Simple strategies for a healthier gut

Your stomach feels full and tight, maybe even painful. Your clothes are constricting, as if you've eaten a big meal.

If this rings a bell, you know what bloating feels like. In fact, a new study finds that almost one in seven adults feels bloated at least once per week.

As common as it is, bloating can feel too insignificant to discuss at a medical visit. But bringing it up to your doctor can help you detect any underlying health problems — and find relief.

Top triggers

Bloating occurs when your gastrointestinal tract fills with air or gas. This happens because of a wide range of causes — some simple, others more serious. These include:

- Swallowing air
- Overeating
- Menstruation
- Constipation

- **Irritable bowel syndrome**
- Lactose intolerance or food sensitivity
- Cancer
- Mental health conditions
- Extra bacteria in your small intestine

Women's symptoms are often more severe than men's, the study found. That may be because of differences in lifestyle, diet, or metabolism.

Finding relief

Some bloating is common. But if your bloating bothers you, changes suddenly, or is accompanied by symptoms like blood in your stool, unintentional weight loss, worsening heartburn, or fever, talk with your doctor.

Your doctor may recommend certain tests and treatments if they suspect your bloating is due to a medical condition.

- To help relieve your bloating:
- Stick to noncarbonated beverages, rather than soda or beer.

- Avoid foods linked to extra gas, including beans, lentils, and cruciferous veggies like broccoli.
- Eat slowly — and when possible, sit down rather than dining on the run.
- Steer clear of chewing gum, sucking hard candy, or using straws, which can all cause you to swallow air.
- Ask your doctor about medicines and supplements. Herbal ingredients such as fennel and peppermint may also ease swelling.

Talk with your doctor about next steps if you still have symptoms after trying these suggestions.

Watch what you eat

You may be able to prevent bloating by making better food choices. Learn more about **healthy eating tips**.

The good, the bad, and the fit: A look at fitness influencers

Fitness influencers on social media make exercise look really appealing. That could be the encouragement you need to start working out or ramp up your routine.

These social media stars share motivational tips, exercise videos, and inspiring stories on sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Many interact frequently with their fans — and there are a lot of us. Top fitness influencers boast thousands or even millions of followers.

But just because someone has killer abs doesn't automatically mean they deserve your trust. Here's how to tell the difference between a good fitness ally and a bad influence.

Spotting questionable advice

Watch for these warning signs that an influencer might sway you in an unhealthy direction.

Lack of training and credentials.

Check the influencer's social media profile and web presence. Is this person a qualified fitness professional, such as a certified personal trainer or exercise physiologist? If not, they may be promoting dangerous advice.

Focus on achieving the

“perfect” body. Fitness comes in many shapes and sizes. But many influencers portray one body type as the ideal. For women, it's a very thin, toned body. For men, it's a hyper-muscular, bodybuilder look. You may end up feeling deeply dissatisfied with your own body. And that may increase your risk for depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders.

Hard-sell tactics. Many influencers sell their own products or promote the brands of their sponsors. Be wary of anyone who seems more interested in your wallet than your well-being.

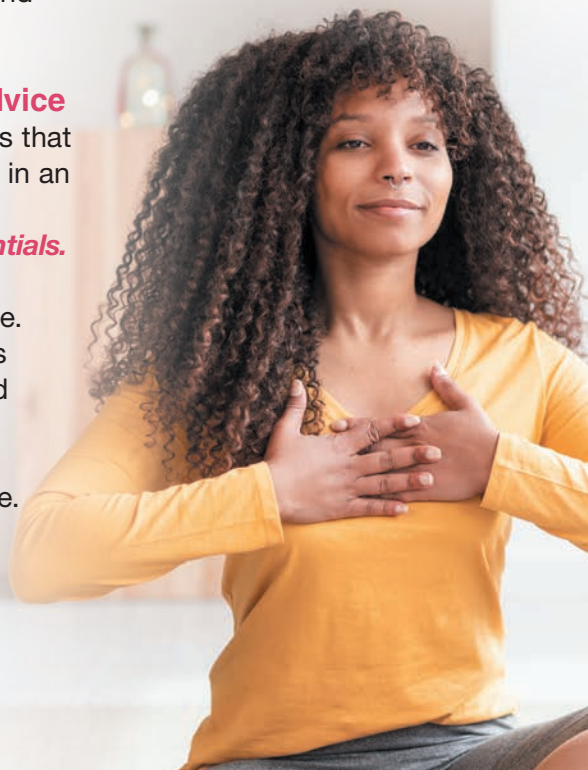
Finding reliable information

If you follow fitness influencers, choose ones with solid credentials. They should motivate you to move, not just scroll on your phone. And they should emphasize improving how your body works, not changing how it looks.

Compare what an influencer says to the information found on credible, science-based websites, such as:

- [acsm.org](https://www.acsm.org) (search for “Resource Library”)
- [cdc.gov/physicalactivity](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity)
- [health.gov/moveyourway](https://www.health.gov/moveyourway)

Even the best online influencer is no substitute for a real-life health expert. For trusted advice on the best types of exercise for your specific needs, talk with your doctor.



YouTubers with heart

Find plenty of fun workout videos on the American Heart Association's YouTube channel. Go to [youtube.com/americanheart](https://www.youtube.com/americanheart) and search for “Move More Together at Home Workouts.”

BEATING BREAST CANCER

Through Early Diagnosis

BREAST CANCER BY THE NUMBERS

~264,000

women are diagnosed with breast cancer annually



~42,000

women die of breast cancer each year



98% are still alive **5 years**

after diagnosis when the cancer is caught at an early stage



RISK FACTORS FOR BREAST CANCER



AGE: Being older than 50

GENETICS: A family history of breast or ovarian cancer



EXERCISE: Not being physically active

HORMONES: Taking them for >5 years during menopause



BREAST TYPE: Having dense breasts

LIFESTYLE: Drinking alcohol



Ask your health care provider about *your personal risk factors* and if you should start getting mammograms at age 45 or 50.

3 FAST FACTS ABOUT MAMMOGRAMS



1. A mammogram is a low-dose X-ray that looks at your breast tissue for any abnormalities that can't be felt.



2. A screening mammogram takes about 20 minutes. You may feel squeezing or pinching, but it only lasts for a few seconds.

3. You have the greatest chance of survival if breast cancer is found early. Mammograms are the best tool for early detection of cancer that can't be seen or felt.



Experts have different recommendations about how often to get mammograms. Talk with your health care provider about *the best screening schedule for you.*