***Self-Care tip: Routines***

Self-Care: everyone thinks they know what it is. Taking a bath or treating yourself to an $8 coffee does count as self-care, but what about more realistic self-care?

Self-care can be defined by the Oxford Dictionary as, “the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress,” (Oxford University Press, 2024). At its most basic form, self-care is anything that you do to actively protect yourself from too much stress.

While this could be as simple as taking a bath or getting a double-espresso shot from your favorite coffee stand, we’ll dive into one self-care tip that can help you feel better, especially when life gets busy.

It’s good to note that self-care looks different for everyone. Something that might work great for a friend might not help at all for you. That’s okay! Mental health and wellness is a spectrum and it often takes a bit of time to see what works for you.

**Routine as a form of self-care**

Setting a routine can be considered self-care, because it welcomes structure, which can ease stress and in turn, help you utilize your time better. A routine allows you to be active in setting the stage for better wellbeing. Having a routine can lead to:

* Lowered stress levels
* Formation of good daily habits instead of “poor” daily habits
* Better care of your physical and mental health
* Better time management, so you feel more productive
* Better focus

Routines can be difficult to build, especially when you’ve got college, work, kids, a social life, or all of the above piled high on your plate. [Mental Health America](https://mhanational.org/creating-healthy-routines) lists ways that you can build up to a routine and succeed at it, including:

* ***Create your own personalized routine***, don’t try to fit into someone else’s mold
* ***Start Small!*** It is not easy to change your entire day, but picking one small thing and doing it until it sticks, then choosing another small change will allow you to ease into making changes.
* ***Make time for things you enjoy!*** Setting aside dedicated time for things you enjoy allow you to feel like the day is yours and allows your brain to release chemicals like dopamine and serotonin into your brain that are important for good mental health.
	+ Setting a routine can actually help carve out more time, because it naturally instills better time management.
* ***Understand that it’s okay to miss a day!*** It can be very hard to stick with a routine. Instead of beating yourself up over it, remind yourself that you are human and you need grace. You can always try again tomorrow!

Another trick for creating routines is called “habit stacking”. Coined from the book *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones* by James Clear, habit stacking is a method of connecting one task to another, so you stack the behavior. Find out how to habit stack and how it works for our brains through the [Cleveland Clinic.](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/habit-stacking)

Overall, while creating and sticking to a routine is just one small part of self-care, routines can open the door for other forms of self-care.

To start, try deciding on one thing you want to change or be better at. This could be taking a daily 10-minute walk after lunch, drinking 2 more bottles of water each day, or taking your daily vitamins. Do this task everyday for a week and see how you do with creating routine!