

Self-care toolkit

This self-care toolkit can help you identify signs and symptoms that indicate you might be close to stress overload. Using it you explore helpful and unhelpful strategies for coping with stress. In the same way we explore goals and aspirations with clients, consider a plan that is realistic and achievable to you. The attitudes of *patience*, *non-striving* and *acceptance* mentioned in the shared care section of the main toolkit, will most definitely apply here as well. The steps below will guide you.

- 1** Use the **stress indicator tool** to identify signs and symptoms that you are feeling stressed, or are about to become stressed. You may recognise some from the **signs and symptoms of stress list**, and others that resonate with you
- 2** Identify both helpful and unhelpful strategies you use to cope with stressful events or situations. You may recognize some of the more unhelpful strategies from the list of behavioural symptoms in the **signs and symptoms of stress list**, and others that resonate with you
- 3** Now use the **self-care plan** to identify those activities and practices that best support your overall self-care. The **self-care prompt** can help you form some ideas
- 4** Commit as best you can to what works wells for you in the medium to long-term, giving yourself all the time you need. Come back to your plan anytime you need too. Try to factor in the ups and downs, and that it may take time before you notice the benefits

Self-care plan

“Self-care is about the activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to minimise stress and maintain our physical, mental and emotional well being.”

- Identify those things most likely to help you address the signs and symptoms of stress noted in your stress indicator tool, and list them in the plan below. Include all helpful strategies identified in your stress indicator tool. The **self-care prompt** can help with some ideas.
- Consider the best way to move forward with your plan, making sure its realistic and achievable. Give yourself plenty of time to make it work for you, perhaps starting out with the things you feel are the most achievable.

- Recognise possible barriers or obstacles that may get in the way of implementing and maintaining your plan. What are they—how can you address them? and how can you remind yourself to follow your plan? For example, high expectations for quick results that may ultimately lead to disappointment and a sense of failure.
- Commit to engage with your plan on a regular basis, adding new activities that you find enjoyable and/or nourishing, but without over striving, as this, like trying to overdo things in other areas of our lives, is a key contributor to stress.
- If it feels comfortable include those with whom you share your life. If they are aware they can often alert you early on to the warning signs of stress, and encourage you to consider what activity or practice in that moment is going to be the most beneficial and nurturing.

'SELF-CARE PLAN'

REMEMBER, everyone reacts differently to stress. Some people may not even feel warning signs until hours or days of stressful activities. But when you do, pay attention to the signs and listen to what your body is telling you. In doing so you are more able to consider how best to take care in that moment and ACT. Taking care of ourselves should not be optional

Signs and symptoms of stress list

Below are some of the more familiar warning signs and symptoms that – when unchecked – can lead to stress overload or chronic stress. Those highlighted in green are responses from frontline project staff when asked ‘*What are the most familiar physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms for you when feeling stressed at work?*’

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS	EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS	BEHAVIOURAL SYMPTOMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhaustion, bringing tiredness to work • Overtired (eye twitching) • Fatigued • Headaches • Feeling sweaty and panicky • Can't sleep • Weariness • Mole on centre of scalp gets sore • Butterflies in stomach • Exhausted and unable to do anything on days off • Aches and pains • Frequent colds and flu • Chest pains, rapid heart rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry • Feeling impatient • Short tempered • Frustration • Disgust (with self) • Tetchy with colleagues • Anxious • Resignation • Dismay • Withdrawn • Moodiness • Irritability • Feeling overwhelmed • Pessimism • Depression • General unhappiness • Overwhelmed • Hopelessness/Helplessness • Disillusionment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overeating • Forget to eat • Neglecting sleep and exercise • Vaping excessively • Shut down – sitting at the computer not able to do anything • Over-thinking • Avoiding clients (taking the back stairs to avoid people) • Smoking • Taking sick days • Want chocolate – lots of it • Beat myself up – feel I'm rubbish at my job • Procrastination • Forgetfulness • Neglecting responsibilities • Increased use of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax • Cramming too much in • Zone out for hours in front of the television • Nervous habits (nail-biting, pacing)

Self-care prompt

“What do I need for myself right now?”

Psychological

- Being more accepting of what you cannot change
- Taking control – we can't control other people and situations, but we can control how we relate to them, and our thoughts
- Adopting a more kinder, gentler approach to difficult or challenging experiences
- Challenging unhelpful thoughts
- Taking regular breathing spaces
- Keeping your sense of humour
- Seeking professional support when needed

Physical

- Making time for physical activities, however small they are
- Gauging how your body is responding to stressful situations, e.g. feeling tightness or tension somewhere in the body. Note how the body is often what alerts us to what the mind is thinking, e.g. negative self-talk
- Eating healthily and mindfully
- Getting enough sleep when you can

Emotional / Spiritual

- Honouring and expressing emotions in ways that are appropriate to you
- Reaching out – talking openly and honestly to others you feel safe with
- When feeling tired or in low mood, factoring in how this is likely to influence how you respond or react to events and situations in that moment in time. For instance, 'I'm feeling low today, (or tired). How might this influence the way I interpret things today.'
- Making time for self-reflection, prayer, or inspirational reading
- Taking moments in your day to reflect on all the things you appreciate

Social

- Connecting with people – spending time with those whose company you enjoy
- Having some quality 'me' time – taking time out to relax, read, walk in nature, swim etc.
- Making time to have fun
- Taking mini-breaks and holidays
- Doing something creative
- Planning pleasant activities