



Aboriginal  
Health & Medical  
Research Council  
of NSW

# Self-care Toolkit

---

A healthy happy mob, means a well done job

*The AH&MRC acknowledges Prime Minister & Cabinet for the support they have provided to the AH&MRC through the Header Agreement.*

# Contents

<b>What is Self-Care and Why is it Important?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Tips and Tricks You Can Integrate into a Busy Life</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Mindfulness and Meditation</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Nutrition and Mental Health</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Change is hard but start small and be around longer for the grannies</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Physical Activity</b>	<b>13</b>

# What is Self-Care and Why is it Important?

*For most of us, the idea of self-care sounds like a luxury, something we'd all love but just can't have right now. Something we would do if we weren't so busy, if we weren't so concerned or preoccupied with helping others first, or worried about what others might think if we DID do something for ourselves.*

---

The art of self-care is very important for our mental and physical health. With the chaotic lives we lead today, and the demands we have placed upon us (and that we place on ourselves!), our bodies are under strain and in a constant state of stress. Mental tension leads to physical tension, creating chronic inflammation and oxidative stress within our bodies which can lead to many health problems.

The result? Our immune systems weaken, allowing viruses such as colds, flus and other illnesses to creep in unannounced and spoil all our plans. Our hormones go out of whack as our body remains in a consistent 'fight or flight' mode, leading to glucose and energy imbalances. We may crave sugary foods, put on excess weight or struggle to shift it despite how hard we try.

Social and emotional wellbeing can have a huge impact of overall health and can be effected by various occurrences and experiences. Evidence shows that even taking 5 minutes a day to incorporate self-care practices can have a positive effect on overall health and enable an individual to become grounded if they have become overwhelmed with what's happening in their life. Self-care is something you can integrate into your service and community, and into your own life.

Within the health sector, especially the SEWB sector, our main focus is to help others become healthy and happy, yet in doing this we can neglect our own health and happiness. This can tend to have a domino effect due to the fact that if we are unhealthy and unhappy, how can we prevent our community from being unhealthy and unhappy. Within the sector it's our responsibility to set the example for our community, and the healthier and happier we are the more we are able to effectively and efficiently do our job and help our community.

Within this resource multiple self-care tools will be provided. However you don't have to do them all. Self-care is a personal practice and what works for you may not work for someone else, so it's good to try a few different techniques to find the best practice for you. The practices that will be outlined in this toolkit include;

- › Tips and tricks you can integrate into a busy life
- › Mindfulness and Meditation
- › Nutrition
- › Exercise/physical activity

## Definition

The World Health Organisation has defined "self care" as "the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider". The scope of self-care includes health promotion; disease prevention and control; self-medication, providing care to dependent persons; seeking hospital/specialist care if necessary; and rehabilitation including palliative care.

— World Health Organisation 2013

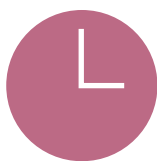
# Tips and Tricks You Can Integrate into a Busy Life

---



## The list

A great way to focus on making sure you do everything you need to do while also taking time for yourself, is writing down a list. Once you've got your list, number each task/activity in terms of how much of a priority it is for you, starting at number one and working your way down. At the end of this task you'll have a list of the tasks you need to do and activities you want to do. Try to always fit in at a balanced amount of tasks and activities.



## Learn some super quick recipes

Slaving over a hot oven is no fun, especially when you've had an awful day and arrive home late at night. To make sure that on these days you don't reach for unhealthy convenience foods learn some super quick recipes you can knock up in an instant (see nutrition section for ideas).



## Talk and Walk

If you tend to be on the phone a lot, think about ways you can get active during these long calls. Getting out of the office and going for a walk somewhere quiet can be a great way to get some exercise without losing any concentration whilst on the phone, or even pacing in your office whilst on the phone can help keep you active and healthy.



## Move Every Day

Physical activity doesn't have to be an hour long high intensity workout that has you wanting to vomit. Physical activity can be as little as talking the stairs, or parking a bit further away from work so that you can increase your daily steps (see physical activity section for ideas).



## Get Some Sun

Vitamin D is an essential nutrient and is important for strong bones, muscles and overall health. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is necessary for the production of vitamin D in the skin and is the best natural source of vitamin D. Evidence has also shown that vitamin D deficiency can lead to moodiness and even depressive feelings. Even just sitting in the sun for 10 minutes can help this, or even trying to eat your lunch in the sun, or going for a short walk outside.



## Pro Tip

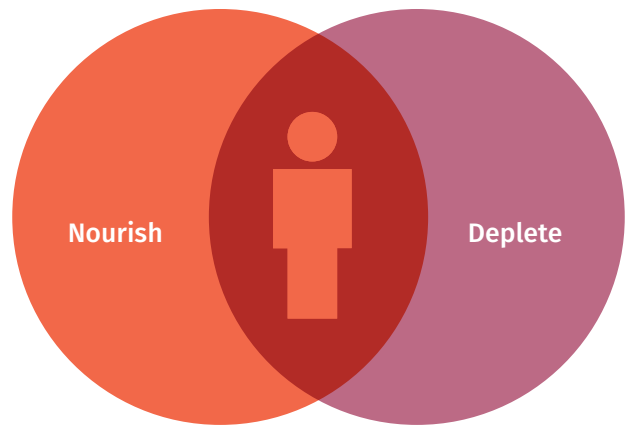
Get everyone involved and set up a challenge at home or at work, e.g.:

- › Stepathon
- › Group boot camp sessions
- › Meatless Mondays
- › Sugar free for a week.



## Practice Self-Reflection

Yes 'self-reflection' is a very wishy washy subject but it is the foundation for good self-esteem and confidence. As a SEWB worker it's important for you to be confident, so you can help others to be confident. Confidence can be affected by a range of experiences and is constantly fluctuating. An important exercise to practice is taking a moment, whether that's while meditating, walking or just sitting quietly, to reflect on yourself and whether you are spending more time trying to be someone else, than you are just being yourself. In society today we are constantly being told to do certain things or be a certain person, we forget to just BE.



## Stress Less

Everyone manages stress differently however a good exercise to do is to make sure you have a balanced amount of tasks/activities in your day that nourish you and or deplete you. Write down every single thing you do in an average day from waking up to going to bed. Next to each item put an N for nourish, or a D for deplete, or an N & D for both. If you have more Ds than Ns perhaps you need to reflect on what more you could do in your day that nourishes you. It's all about balance as we can't expect to be stress free all the time.

### Fact

Stress is an unpleasant emotion that virtually everyone has experienced, and or constantly experiences. When we become stressed our hypothalamus, a tiny control tower in our brain, decides to send out the order: Send in the stress hormones! These stress hormones are the same ones that trigger your body's "fight or flight" response. Your heart races, your breath quickens, and your muscles ready for action. This response was designed to protect your body in an emergency by preparing you to react quickly. But when the stress response keeps firing, day after day, it could put your health at serious risk. And unfortunately for humans, unlike most other animals, our brain can't differentiate between the stress of a lion standing right in front of us, or being overwhelmed by work.

# Mindfulness and Meditation

## Different Types of Meditation

- › Meditation in a seated position
- › Meditation laying down
- › Guided meditation (see apps)
- › Walking meditation
- › Body Scan meditation

## 5 Reasons to Start Meditating

### 1 Meditation provides you with quality “me time”

Being super busy involves being around other people a lot of the time, whether it's at work, school, home, social events, etc. Now, spending time with others is important but when is the last time you took 10 minutes to yourself? Meditation provides you with that quality “me time” that's so key to refilling your cup at the end of the day. It's not only me time in terms of being alone and being away from others, but being away from your day to day thoughts. Quality time with your inner self, to connect, reset, and reflect. Providing yourself with “me time” helps us unwind, allows for self-discovery, and ultimately improves our happiness and satisfaction with life because we become more in-tune with ourselves and what we desire. I know that it can sound intimidating to think that meditation is just sitting there alone with your thoughts in silence. Some people do meditate in silence, but if that's not your thing, there are plenty of guided meditations, and meditation music tracks that you can play during your “me time” meditation session.

### 2 Anyone can start a meditation practice

Since self-care has become an “industry” recently, and the term is used to market tons of wellness products, and expensive facial treatments, it's always good to remind ourselves that self-care does not have to cost money. In reality, you can cultivate a quality, consistent self-care practice without spending a dime on extra “self-care specific” items. Meditation is a perfect example of totally free self-care. Anyone can do it, and everyone should give it a try! All you need is your brain. You can even download free meditation apps so you have no excuse not to add meditation to your self-care tool kit. Meditation is a unique self-care tool in that everyone has access to it, you don't need much background knowledge about it to try it out, and it's totally adaptable. As you grow, you learn what works, and what doesn't and it's always fun to try different methods of meditation and incorporate new tools into your practice.

How can we combat our need to be busy, and add some self-care into our schedules? Meditation is the perfect tool to add to your self-care kit, especially when we're talking about learning to slow down and take some time for yourself.

### 3 Meditation nourishes almost all of the self care domains

Meditation functions as a form of physical self-care, emotional self-care, and psychological self-care, personal self-care, AND spiritual self-care. So we're only missing professional self-care, and honestly, you can find a way to relate it to that too. With that said, meditation nourishes your mind, body, and soul all at once. Sounds amazing right? Think about it. Meditation has SO many benefits both physically and emotionally. It reduces stress, manages anxiety, reduces feelings of depression, connects you to your inner self, promotes self-discovery, increases emotional intelligence, increases self-awareness, increases gratitude, and improves sleep. All of these benefits fall into one or more of the self-care domains, making meditation a super self-care tool. Plus, depending on how you customize your meditation practice, you can choose to focus on a particular domain or aspect of your life. For example, you can meditate to increase self-love, confidence, creativity, inspiration, focus, motivation, and pretty much anything else you can think of.

### 4 Meditation provides mental clarity

When you're constantly busy, your mind is running non-stop and easily becomes clouded. Thoughts are always buzzing through your mind about things you need to do, people you need to see, places you need to go, etc. etc. etc. Meditation provides the opportunity to clear your mind of all the chaos and refocus on what's really important. When you're moving so fast all the time, it's easy to lose track of what your actual goals and priorities are (even though you probably don't realise it in the moment). So it's important to take a moment to slow down, and refocus. Clear your mind of all of the worries about things you can't control, and focus on things you can actually do something about. Things that are actually priorities and deserve to take up valuable space in your busy mind. No matter how busy you are, you have at least 5 minutes a day to clear your mind, relax, and reset to be more prepared for the day ahead of you.

## 5 Meditation increases mindfulness

Along the same lines as mental clarity, comes the importance of mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.” That’s basically the mental state you achieve during meditation. So through practicing meditation, you can learn to be mindful in your day to day life, meaning you’ll learn to slow down and be in the present moment. That’s really the goal here. To understand that you don’t have to be constantly busy, and that it’s okay to take things slowly and enjoy your life to the fullest. Take the time to see the positives in every day, and escape the cycle of rushing through each week and living for the weekend. There’s so much more to be grateful for in the world and it’s important to be intentional about what we choose to do, and enjoy the things we put our energy into.



### Free Meditation Resources (Free stuff, got to love that!)

Meditation doesn’t have to be sitting in silence trying to focus on emptying your mind, because for most people this can be virtually impossible. Guided meditation is perfect for beginners and allows your mind to be free of worry, by focusing on the words of the speaker. You can download free apps, grab some head phones, or sit in a quiet place and spend as little as 5 minutes listening to a guided meditation. Or if you want to offer guided meditation sessions within your service or as part of SEWB program you can follow guided meditation scripts. There are lots of scripts available online (see below) and you can even write your own.

[www.innerhealthstudio.com/meditation-scripts.html](http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/meditation-scripts.html)

[www.exploremeditation.com/healing-your-inner-child-meditation-script/](http://www.exploremeditation.com/healing-your-inner-child-meditation-script/)

[www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/guided-meditation-script-inner-stillness.html](http://www.the-guided-meditation-site.com/guided-meditation-script-inner-stillness.html)

\*Disclaimer – Some apps have the option to pay for subscriptions to access more

Free

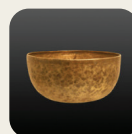
### Meditation apps



Calm



Headspace



Insight Timer



Stop, Breathe, & Think



Aura



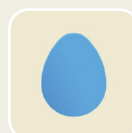
The Mindfulness app



Smiling Mind



MindFi



Mind the Bump

# Nutrition and Mental Health

*Eating well is important. It's part of life. It's part of a routine. Eating well is not only important for physical health, but also emotional and mental health. Recent studies have shown time and time again that your gut has a clear connection to your brain. This gut-brain connection has shown that a poor diet can lead to higher risk of poor social and emotional wellbeing, especially experiences of depression and anxiety.*

The gut-brain connection is no joke; it can link anxiety to stomach problems and vice versa. Have you ever had a “gut-wrenching” experience? Do certain situations make you “feel like you want to throw up”? Have you ever felt “butterflies” in your stomach? We use these expressions for a reason. The gut is sensitive to emotion. Anger, anxiety, sadness, excitement — all of these feelings (and others) can trigger symptoms in the gut. This sensitivity also works both ways which is why evidence shows that poor mental health can lead to stomach issues, and poor diet can lead to mental health issues.

## Fact

Five of the seven leading risk factors that contribute to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians – obesity, high blood cholesterol, alcohol, high blood pressure and low fruit and vegetable intake – relate to poor diet.

## 10 golden rules to shape dietary behaviour and help with mental health:

- 1 Eat mostly plants.** Veggies and beans are nutrient and fibre rich.
- 2 Use plenty of herbs and spices.** Particularly turmeric and saffron — the rules aren't called “golden” for nothing.
- 3 Go nuts!** Research shows that nuts help with your mood. (And the play on words is irresistible.)
- 4 Eating for your gut.** This includes foods such as; yogurt, sauerkraut, kefir, kombucha, miso, kimchi and pickles.
- 5 Fats are your friend.** Healthy fats, like omega-3s, are thought to have a positive influence on parts of the brain linked to depression. E.g. salmon, sardines, mackerel, walnuts, chia seed, flax seeds.
- 6 Getting the right balance of protein.** E.g. good proteins like fish and lean meat and avoid highly processed meat products like ham, sausages and bacon.
- 7 Avoid sweeteners and additives.** Again, highly processed food has been linked to poor mental health. Avoid refined sugar and artificial sweeteners and opt for natural sweeteners like honey, rice malt syrup and maple syrup.
- 8 Keep an eye on your blood sugar.** This has all kinds of benefits and is never remiss.
- 9 Vary your diet.** The average Western diet consists of around 20 ingredients, whereas ancestral humans probably ate more like 150.
- 10 Relax and enjoy.** We can't forget the benefits of eating as a social and recreational activity — there's a reason pretty much every culture focuses their celebrations around food.



## 7 tips on how to eat well

*Whether that's to keep yourself healthy and feeling good, or to help with mental health issues you are facing.*

---



### 1 Mindful eating

If you concentrate on what you're eating, you'll probably eat more healthily. For example, people who eat while watching television tend to eat too much at one sitting.

Practising mindfulness and being aware of what you are doing has its own benefits.



### 2 Sleep

Getting enough sleep is important. Bananas, spinach, almonds, cherries and fish can all help you sleep better. Try to have your main meal 2-3 hours before bed. If you're hungry, a piece of fruit or a glass of milk is the best bedtime snack.



### 3 Think fish

Long chain omega-3 fatty acids are good for your mental health. You get them in oily fish like tuna, salmon, mackerel, perch, herring and sardines. 2-3 meals a week of oily fish will provide enough omega-3. You can also try white fish - cod, bass, haddock, snapper and more.



### 4 Drink water

Drinking plenty of water helps prevent dehydration. Mild dehydration can make you cranky and irritable. Learn more about the importance of hydration and drinking water.



### 5 Healthy food swaps

It can be easier to make small changes than big changes. They're more likely to stick. Swap white breads for wholegrain breads. Swap the frying pan for the grill. Swap salted nuts for unsalted nuts. Think of healthy food swaps.



### 6 Go easy on the alcohol

Alcohol is a depressant. While it can make you feel good for a while, overall it makes you feel bad. If you are taking antidepressant medication, alcohol interferes with how well they work. Drink in moderation.



### 7 Go easy on yourself

Change doesn't usually happen overnight. Take small steps to improve your diet, make changes and practice positive self-talk. Some of those changes will be easy, others will be harder. You'll stick with some, and not stick with others. In time, they will become healthy eating habits that come naturally.

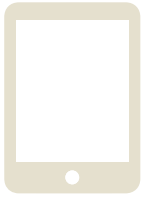
# Change is hard but start small and be around longer for the grannies

## Healthy Food Swaps

---

White bread	→	Wholegrain sandwich and wrap bread
White Pasta	→	Wholegrain pasta, spiralized vegetables
White rice	→	Brown rice, wild rice, quinoa, cauliflower rice
Lollies	→	Dried/fresh fruit
Chips	→	Lightly salted popcorn, baked vegetables, and kale chips
Cakes and Biscuits	→	Homemade cakes free of white flour and refined sugar
Sugary cereal	→	Porridge, homemade bircher muesli, weet-bix, fresh fruit & yogurt
Butter	→	Avocado, or have without
Refined sugar	→	Honey, rice malt syrup, maple syrup, agave nectar
White Flour	→	Wholemeal flour, spelt flour, buckwheat flour, brown rice flour
Pizza	→	Homemade pizza using wrap bread for a base, lean meats and minimal cheese
Hot Chips	→	Baked potatoes, baked sweet potato chips
Burgers	→	Wraps with lots of vegetables
Chocolate	→	Dark chocolate – 70% cocoa and above
Soft drinks & alcohol	→	Soda water with fresh fruits like lime and berries, and mint; kombucha
Unhealthy snacks	→	Trail mixes, vegetable sticks and hummus, apples and peanut butter
Coffee	→	Black coffee, black tea, herbal tea

---



## Nutrition Resources

### Websites

[www.makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-people](http://www.makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal-people)

[www.gethealthynsw.com.au](http://www.gethealthynsw.com.au)

[www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

[www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/4423\\_HF\\_Koori\\_Cookbook\\_FA\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/4423_HF_Koori_Cookbook_FA_WEB.pdf)

[www.healthyweightweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/What-does-a-food-label-tell-us-Indigenous-Nutrition-IG-2013.pdf](http://www.healthyweightweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/What-does-a-food-label-tell-us-Indigenous-Nutrition-IG-2013.pdf)

[www.vaccho.org.au/wd/nutrition](http://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/nutrition)

### Apps



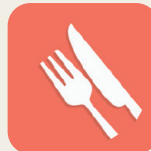
**MyFitnessPal**



**ShopWell**



**MyNetDiary**



**MyPlate**



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guide to **Healthy** Eating

Eat different types  
of foods from the five  
food groups every day.



Drink plenty  
of water.



Use small amounts



Only sometimes  
and in small amounts



# Physical Activity

## Look and feel deadly!

Exercise has many benefits, not only for your physical health but also your mental health. In your brain, exercise stimulates chemicals that improve your mood and the parts of the brain responsible for memory and learning.

Australian Government guidelines recommend adults do at least 30 minutes of moderate to intensive physical activity on most or all days of the week. You can make up 30 minutes over the day by combining shorter 10–15 minute sessions. However, any physical activity is better than none, movement in any form is good for us.

Exercise makes you feel good because it releases chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that improve your mood. It can also get you out in the world, help to reduce any feelings of loneliness and isolation, and put you in touch with other people. If you exercise regularly, it can reduce your stress and symptoms of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, and help with recovery from mental health issues. Exercise also helps improve your sleep, which is important in many different ways.



## Resources

### Deadly Running Australia

Deadly Running Australia (DRA) has grown from the successful Deadly Fun Run series and the voluntary work that the Indigenous Marathon Project (IMP) Graduates are contributing to their communities, to pass forward the positive mental, emotional and physical benefits that IMP experience has provided to them.

[www.imf.org.au/deadly-running/auto-draft](http://www.imf.org.au/deadly-running/auto-draft)

### The NSW Aboriginal Knockout Health Challenge

The challenge is community- led weight loss and healthy lifestyle program for Aboriginal communities across NSW. The Challenge is delivered in partnership with Barwon Aboriginal Corporation who have strong connections with Country Rugby League (CRL) and National Rugby League (NRL). The program consists of two 10 week challenges run throughout the year. Communities across NSW are encouraged to register a team. The program is open to those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent aged 16 years and older, living in NSW.

[www.nswknockouthealthchallenge.com.au](http://www.nswknockouthealthchallenge.com.au)

## Black dog institute<sup>1</sup>

### Make a plan

Start slowly and build up gradually, e.g. if you have not been exercising at all, start with a 10-15 minute walk each morning, and gradually increase this to 30 minutes per day. Set short-term realistic goals for exercising each week (e.g. 3 x 20-minute walks per week); plan to exercise at specific times of the day that fit in with your lifestyle and write your plan down. A range of health professionals can assist with increasing your activity level.

### Keep motivated

- › Keep an activity diary to document your daily exercise.
- › A pedometer can be helpful in keeping track of your activity levels.
- › Reward yourself when you achieve your short-term exercise goals.

### Keep it up

- › You don't have to join a gym – try a few different activities to find those you enjoy (e.g. walking the dog, jogging, riding a bike, gardening, bushwalking, yoga, weight-lifting).
- › Give yourself a break – if you don't stick to your exercise plan, simply start again from where you left off.
- › Remember that it can take time for the benefits of exercise to occur. Most exercise studies have shown a significant reduction in depression after eight weeks or more.
- › Get other people involved – ask a friend, partner or relative to join you. Although it is common to not feel like socialising when experiencing depression, it can be helpful to include others in exercise so that you feel supported and motivated.
- › Write down the benefits you would like to gain from exercise, and refer to these to help with motivation (e.g. to reduce stress, improve mood, get in shape and improve sleep).
- › Write down the situations you expect would make it difficult to exercise, and develop a plan to address them. For example, if it rains, go for a walk in a shopping centre; if you feel too tired for a full exercise session, go for a 10-minute walk.

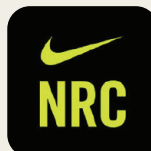
<sup>1</sup> Blackdoginstitute.org.au. (2017). Black Dog Institute. [online] Available at: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2018].

## Where to get help

If you are new to exercise, pregnant, a smoker, or overweight, or have heart disease or major health problems, it is recommended that you seek medical advice before commencing an exercise program. The following health professionals can assist in this process:

- › Exercise physiologists are university qualified allied health professionals who specialise in the delivery of exercise, lifestyle and behavioural programs for the prevention and management of chronic conditions (including depression) and injuries. People who have ongoing health conditions (e.g. depression) may be able to receive Medicare rebates for up to five sessions with an exercise physiologist if their GP has prepared a Chronic Disease Management Plan for them. For more information on exercise physiologists (and to find an exercise physiologist in your area), visit:
  - › [www.essa.org.au](http://www.essa.org.au)
  - › [www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/chronic-medicalcondition-assistance](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/chronic-medicalcondition-assistance)
  - › Or speak to a GP to find out more about your eligibility to receive the Medicare rebates.
- › General practitioners (GPs) may be able to provide advice and information about depression and exercise, and can provide a referral to a qualified exercise physiologist under Medicare.
- › Psychologists and clinical psychologists can assist with activity scheduling, increasing your motivation to exercise, and problem-solving to overcome barriers to exercise.

### Useful Apps



**Nike+ Running App**



**Fitness Buddy**



**Body Space – Social Fitness**



**JEFIT Workout Tracker**



**Johnson & Johnson Official 7 Minute Workout**



**All Trails**

## Notes

