

Module 28

Self Care

Flourish



Self-Care

What is Self-Care?

Self-care refers to the practice of taking care of your physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being.

It involves activities and **habits**.

Self-care is not just about indulgent spa days or quiet meditation retreats (although it could be!), especially for women with ADHD.

For neurodivergent women, self-care is a necessary and intentional tool for navigating a world primarily designed for neurotypical minds. It's likely you have neglected self-care, and instead sacrificed most aspects of self-care to function in the world.



Self-Care

Why Self-Care Matters

🌻 Four reasons Why Self-Care Matters:

Avoid Burnout: The ADHD nervous system can easily get stuck in chronic stress due to feeling unsupported. Human bodies were built to have short bursts of stress and then recover, not to be in stress all the time. When this happens, burnout can result. This is a state that is hard to return from.

Be Your Best Self for Others: When your self is cared for, you are happier and more regulated. This allows you to be a better friend, partner, worker, or dreamer.

Resilience against Life Stress: Think of self-care as protection. It helps you bounce back faster and handle life's stress.

Stay Emotionally Balanced and Regulated: Self-care helps you stay balanced, making it less likely for RSD and emotional dysregulation to set in and create stress cycles.

Self-Care

Avoid Burnout



Be your Best Self For Others



Protection From Life stress



Stay Emotionally Regulated



Why Self Care Matters

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Self Care

The Reality:

As a woman with ADHD, you may face a higher risk of mental and health problems due to the pressure to function in ways and in environments that may not be friendly to you.

You may feel like you have to conceal who you are to fit into a world that doesn't understand or support you.

To reduce these risks, it's important to take good care of yourself with **radical self-care**.

Note:

As a woman, you may have been taught to prioritize caring for others over your own needs. However, it's crucial to break this pattern and belief that self-care is selfish or wrong.



self-care is
not selfish

Self Care

Reflections on Self-Care

Self-Care for ADHD Women: Navigating Complex Realities

The Invisible Struggle

In the intricacies of daily life, the person we often forget first is ourselves.

Reflect:

- How many meals do you miss?
- How often do you forget to hydrate yourself?
- How often are you sleeping well?
- Are you resting enough after periods when you push yourself at work or at home?
- Are you feeling a constant drive to achieve and/or keep up?
- How many moments do you bypassed your body's needs?



Realities that make ADHD Women's Self Care Hard

1. **Executive Functioning Challenges:** As we know, ADHD can lead to difficulties in planning, remembering, and organizing. Drinking, eating, and resting are not going to rise to the level of your attention until they present a crisis. Self-care is preventative, so it may not get attended to.
2. **The Pressure to Perform:** Especially for women with ADHD, there's an unspoken expectation to always achieve, mask differences, and keep up. This relentless drive often pushes self-care to the back burner.
3. **Intersectional Issues:** For those with multiple marginalized identities, societal pressures and systemic biases intensify. Given these compounded stresses, the concept of self-care, which is essential for well-being, might feel more distant or even unattainable for them. The reality is, while every ADHD Person faces obstacles, some women unquestionably grapple with more layered complexities, making self-care seem like a luxury rather than a basic need. Regardless of what you are going through, you can still implement a self-care plan.
4. **Social Conditioning:** Women, and particularly ADHD women, have often been conditioned to prioritize others' needs above their own. This self-sacrifice is sometimes seen as a virtue, but it can come at the cost of our health and well-being.

Reflection

Despite the odds that are stacked against you, you still have a part of you that knows you need to practice self-care. This group, for example, is an act of self-care.

Can you think of anything else you do that is an act of self-care?

Reclaiming Self-Care

In our group and workbook on self-care, we will explore what self-care might mean to you and see what small steps you can take to practice more self-care.

Let's keep in mind that part of practicing self-care requires you:

- Challenge societal and internal pressures that demand continuous performance.
- Question the deep-seated conditioning that urges women to serve others at the expense of themselves.
- Do a little work to put in place systems to scaffold your executive functioning.

👉 SELF-CARE is a journey of reprioritization.

- "The true work of 'self-care' is recognizing you are the only one who can give yourself permission to take back your time and energy."

- - Dr. Pooia Lakshmin, M.D. Currently writing *The Tyranny of Self-Care*

Four Foundations of Self-Care

- 1.Nourishing Yourself: Feeding yourself and hydrating yourself.
- 2.Resting Yourself: Building in periods of rest. Which might mean engaging in periods of solitude, creativity, connecting with friends, or engaging in your special interest.
- 3.Sleep: Getting enough sleep which is essential for you mood and executive functions.
- 4.Moving Your Body: Moving your body in some way.



Nourishing Yourself with Food

Eating Disorders, Hyperfocus, and Alexithymia

Women with ADHD are at a greater risk for co-occurring eating disorders than those without ADHD. This relationship is complex, as emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depression can contribute to a further complicated relationship with food. Additionally, issues with alexithymia (difficulty identifying and expressing emotions) and hyperfocus can further complicate matters. It can be challenging to remember to eat when hyperfocused on a task or when not aware of hunger cues. In these cases, external scaffolding, such as timers, may be helpful reminders to eat.

Blood Sugar

Fluctuations in blood sugar levels can cause difficulty concentrating, irritability, and mood swings and exacerbate difficulties you might already have.

So, what's the best advice for an ADHD woman when it comes to diet?

Most articles and research suggest that maintaining stable blood sugar levels by eating regular meals, focusing on complex carbohydrates, and limiting excessive sugar is a good idea.

Nourishing Yourself

Bottom line:

A good general goal is to learn to eat regularly and keep yourself nourished.

Try to eat some vegetables and fruits .



Here are some tips to help you towards this self-care goal if it's a challenge for you:

Keeping food handy and accessible is a good step towards nourishing yourself.

I once saw a video that recommended keeping a platter of convenient, pre-prepared food in your fridge.

Choose foods that are appealing to you, and you know you will want to eat. Examples include peanut butter and crackers, olives and a block of cheese, apples or apple slices, and dark chocolate. Whatever you choose for the platter, it should be easy for you to feed yourself and appealing. You can pull that platter out whenever you need a quick meal, and it serves as a visual reminder to nourish yourself! This way, you are more likely to feed yourself regularly.



Nourishing Yourself

Do the best you can to EAT. Set reminders at intervals to remind yourself to eat so you don't get hungry. Have food placed around strategically to cue yourself. Keep notes and signs around to trigger your memory.

Don't get caught up in shame about food patterns. You can eat in any way that works for you or your family, as long as you are nourishing yourself. Believing you need to cook meals or keep up with the housewives next door is harmful and impractical.

Make it as convenient as possible and accommodate your ADHD brain in any way you need to.



Watering Yourself



Drinking water is essential for everyone, regardless of whether they have ADHD. However, for individuals with ADHD, it's more important for several reasons:

- Cognitive Functioning: Dehydration can impair attention, memory, and cognitive functioning.
- Brain Health: Even mild dehydration can impact neurotransmitter production and function. We believe ADHD is partially due to issues with neurotransmitters so let's not mess with that.
- Medication Side Effects: Staying hydrated helps regulate your body temperature and the side effects that ADHD medication may cause you.
- Mood Regulation: Dehydration can negatively affect mood and exacerbate feelings of anxiety or depression.
- Sleep: Proper hydration supports optimal melatonin production, which is crucial for sleep.



Self-Care WATER



Dehydration can
impair your
executive
functioning

Dehydration can
impair
neurotransmitter
production

Staying hydrated can help
regulate your
temperature and balance
and help with other adhd
medication side effects

Dehydration can
negatively effect
mood and anxiety
and depression



Proper
hydration
supports
melatonin
production





Movement and Exercise

Boosting Neurotransmitters: Exercise stimulates the release of dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, neurotransmitters that play a significant role in attention, motivation, and mood regulation.

Improving Cognitive Function: Regular physical activity enhances cognitive functions such as working memory, attention, and executive function, which are areas often impacted in individuals with ADHD.

Stress Management: Physical activity is a natural stress-reliever.

Promoting Sleep: Women with ADHD often experience sleep disturbances or irregularities. Regular exercise can help regulate the sleep-wake cycle, promoting better sleep quality and duration.

Emotional Regulation: Regular movement can play a role in mood stabilization, helping to reduce the emotional dysregulation that some ADHD individuals experience.



Movement and Exercise

More reasons movement and exercise are good for ADHD:

Exercise **promotes brain growth**, improves **brain efficiency**, and **strengthens learning abilities**. The changes in the brain associated with exercise are most dramatic in areas related to ADHD: executive functioning, attention, and working memory

Sustained exercise may significantly decrease the negative epigenetic effects of stress or trauma.

Studies suggest that exercise has a greater **impact on ADHD symptoms** than food, a more commonly promoted treatment strategy.

While the body of research on exercise is still small compared to that on medication or therapy, the effect on some people with ADHD can be extraordinary.



Tips to help your with remembering to drink more water



What to do to help you help yourself drink more water.

- ☛ **Get yourself one of those beautiful water bottles that motivate you.**
- ☛ **Keep a pitcher of ice water in the fridge.**
- ☛ **Get yourself a straw !**
- ☛ **Drink flavored water.**
- ☛ **Make it a competition with a friend**
- ☛ **Hook it onto another activity.**

For example:

- **[] Each time I check my email I will drink a glass of water.**
- **[] Each time I let the dogs out I will have glass of water.**

BDNF

BDNF, or Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor, is a protein found in the brain and central nervous system.

Exercise appears to help create BDNF.

BDNF is crucial for **neuroplasticity**, which is the brain's ability to reorganize and adapt.

Proper levels of BDNF can support improved learning, memory, and overall cognitive function, which can be particularly beneficial for individuals with ADHD.

Stress and sleep deprivation are two factors that can decrease BDNF levels.

Chronic stress and elevated cortisol levels can reduce BDNF expression, while lack of adequate sleep can lead to decreased BDNF levels. Therefore, it is essential to manage stress and prioritize good sleep hygiene to maintain optimal levels of BDNF.

Sleep

People with ADHD often have trouble sleeping. They may take longer to fall asleep, wake up more often during the night, and not sleep as well overall.

Common Sleep Issues Associated with ADHD:

Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS): A circadian rhythm sleep disorder where a person's sleep-wake cycle is delayed by two or more hours beyond the socially acceptable or conventional bedtime. This delay in falling asleep causes difficulty in waking up at a desired time.

Treatment Approaches for DSPS:

- **Good Sleep Hygiene:** Maintain a regular sleep schedule, create a relaxing bedtime routine, avoid caffeine and electronic devices before bedtime, and ensure a comfortable sleep environment.
- **Chronotherapy:** Gradually delay the bedtime by 1-2 hours each day until the desired bedtime is reached. However, this method can be quite challenging to maintain and is not suitable for everyone.
- **Light Therapy:** Exposure to bright light in the morning can help reset the circadian rhythm. It is usually recommended to get exposure to bright light for about 30 minutes to 2 hours upon waking up.
- **Melatonin Supplements:** Melatonin is a hormone that regulates sleep-wake cycles. Taking melatonin supplements in the evening can help shift the circadian rhythm to an earlier time. However, the timing and dosage of melatonin should be carefully adjusted under the guidance of a healthcare professional.
- **Medications:** In some cases, prescription medications like sedatives or sleep aids may be prescribed by a healthcare professional.

Sleep

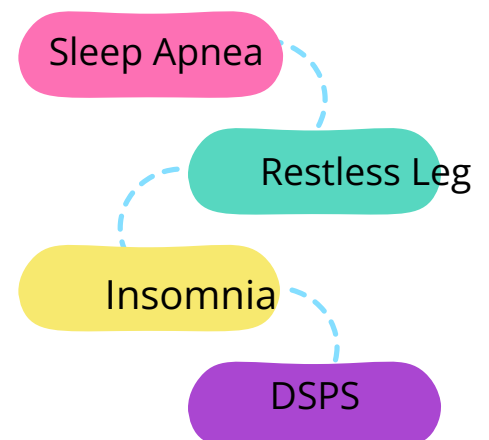
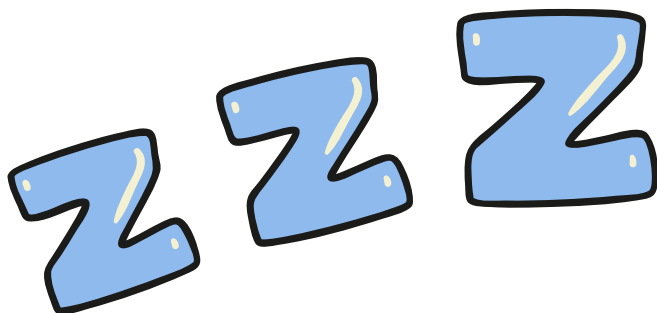
Note: Adapting to societal sleep-wake times is often necessary, but it's advised to align your life with your natural rhythm and consult a professional for a personalized plan.

Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS): Irresistible urge to move legs, often with uncomfortable sensations. Treatment for Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS) typically involves a combination of lifestyle changes, iron supplementation if necessary, and medications. Estimates at over 30 percent of adhd people have RLS.

Sleep Apnea: Repeated breathing interruptions during sleep, causing fragmented sleep and daytime sleepiness. The most common treatments include machine which uses a hose connected to a mask or nosepiece to deliver constant and steady air pressure to help keep the airways open.

during sleep. Estimated over 30 percent of adhd people have sleep apnea.

Insomnia: Trouble falling/staying asleep or waking too early. CBT medication are the treatments used.





Revenge Bedtime Procrastination



Revenge bedtime procrastination (RBP) is when one delays bedtime to reclaim personal time, especially after feeling overwhelmed during the day.

Understanding the Phenomenon:

You might get engrossed in a hyperfocus activity and do not want to sleep until late.

Women, especially, often feel overwhelmed during the day, lacking personal or leisure time. Hence, the night becomes their 'me-time', usually involving tech activities that might not be very fulfilling.

Strategies to Improve Sleep with RBP:

- In the event of revenge bedtime procrastination try giving yourself some free time to enjoy yourself during the week.
- Control the environment so you don't get tempted at night.



A Few Tips About Sleep

- Stimulants: Contrary to popular belief, sometimes ADHD medications can help with sleep if taken appropriately.
- Routine: Establish a consistent bedtime routine to reinforce the body's circadian rhythm.
- Sunlight: Exposure to natural sunlight can help regulate sleep patterns.
- Exercise: Comparable to sleep pills, it affects the circadian clock and can help reinforce a sleep routine.
- Limit Tech: Avoid screens an hour before sleep. Use candles instead of bright lights at night.





A Few Tips About Sleep

- Avoid Naps: The buildup of adenosine, a sleep-regulating chemical, makes us sleepy. Napping disrupts this.
- Bedtime Prep: Complete bedtime preparations early in the evening to minimize resistance.
- Find Joy in Sleep: Link positive emotions with sleep. Embrace challenges, novelty, and fun to make bedtime more appealing.

Understanding one's triggers and creating a personalized system can foster positive emotions, making it easier to adhere to a better sleep schedule. Celebrating small successes, like getting to bed on time, can boost dopamine and promote better habits.



REST

Why is rest so important for adhd women?

Absolutely!

We've discussed how women with ADHD, often face stress from not having adequate support and being overly self-critical. This can activate the Sympathetic System, or the Fight-Flight-Freeze (FFF) response.

While this is a natural response to stress, being constantly in this mode is incredibly draining. Moreover, frequent activation of this state can lead to illness, as our bodies are not designed to handle continuous stress.

Conversely, the Parasympathetic System, or the Rest and Digest mode, helps the body relax and recover. It's crucial to maintain a balance between these two systems for overall well-being. That's why self-care is essential - it helps achieve this balance. And one of the most important aspects of self-care? Rest.

For women with ADHD, who are often pushed beyond their comfort levels, finding that balance means reaching a calm, neutral state. It's vital to escape the continuous cycle of productivity that society often demands.

Research suggests adhd is correlated with highers stress, immune dysregulation, and certain illnessess.

Finding Balance:

We talked about the rest state in our stress unit. If you remember we worked on rest challenge and overwehlem. You might want to go back and do that exercise again.

REST

Rest must be incorporated into your life deliberately. Recently seven distinct types of rest have been proposed, each catering to different aspects of our well-being. These include physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, creative, social, and sensory rest, each addressing unique facets from body aches to emotional overload. Recognizing and addressing the specific type of rest we lack can help keep us healthy.



A NOTE ABOUT Grief

Practicing self-care when you are neurodivergent can sometimes involve grief. Letting go of the idea that you will somehow magically keep up with the demands of neurotypical society is, in fact, practicing self-care. This can be true for any woman, but it is a topic that is rarely discussed.

It's hard to let go of the core belief that, somehow, if you just try hard enough or find a magic pill, you could meet all the expectations and achieve the unrealistic demands of the gold standard women.

She is a creation, she isn't real.

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Steps

Step 1:

Choose an Area of Focus:

- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Nourishment
- ☐ Hydration
- ☐ Movement

Step 2:

Please choose one goal from your area of focus or write your own.

After you pick your goal, make sure to move on to steps 3, 4, and 5 at the end of your worksheet.

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity



Rest Goals :

- ☐ Read for ten minutes a day twice this week.
- ☐ Spend an hour with a friend
- ☐ Engage in my special interest for fifteen minutes a day twice this week.
- ☐ Sit outside in nature for ten minutes once this week.
- ☐ Listen to calming music for ten minutes each day.
- ☐ Practice deep breathing or meditation for five minutes. one a day
- ☐ Take a short break from screens every hour.
- ☐ Sketch, color, or journal for ten minutes for twice this week.
- ☐ Engage in a hobby or craft for fifteen minutes once a week.
- ☐ Listen to a podcast or audiobook for ten minutes once a week.
- ☐ Do a quick relaxation or visualization exercise for five minutes every day.

Your
own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity



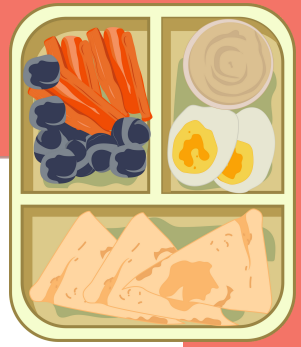
Sleep Goals :

- ☐ Go to bed ten minutes earlier twice this week.
- ☐ Remove the phone from my room a half hour before bed one day a week.
- ☐ Sleep in for an extra ten minutes a day once this week.
- ☐ Purchase a mask to block out light.
- ☐ Experience sunlight as soon as I wake up.
- ☐ Keep the bedroom cool for better sleep quality.
- ☐ Avoid caffeine six hours before bedtime.
- ☐ Create a bedtime ritual, like reading or stretching.
- ☐ Make the bedroom a screen-free zone once this week.
- ☐ Set an alarm to remind me it's bedtime every night this week.

Your
own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity



Nourishment Goals :

- ☐ Remind myself to eat one meal a day.
- ☐ Eat one vegetable a day.
- ☐ Eat one fruit a day.
- ☐ Prepare a platter for my fridge once this week.
- ☐ Try a new healthy recipe once a week.
- ☐ Eat a healthy snack one day a week.
- ☐ Increase protein intake in one meal a day.
- ☐ Drink a smoothie or health drink once a day.
- ☐ Avoid skipping breakfast.
- ☐ Remember to eat by setting a timer one day a week

Your

own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity



Hydration Goals :

- ☐ Drink an extra glass of water daily.
- ☐ Carry a water bottle everywhere one day this week.
- ☐ Limit caffeine or soda one day a week.
- ☐ Try a piece a fruit you never had
- ☐ Set hourly reminders to sip water.
- ☐ Drink a glass of water before each meal.
- ☐ Track daily water intake.
- ☐ Flavor water with natural fruits for variety.
- ☐ Skip the alcohol one night this week.
- ☐ Drink a glass of water as soon as I wake up

Your
own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity



Movement Goals :

- ☐ Walk for five minutes each day.
- ☐ Do a yoga exercise for five minutes each day.
- ☐ Dance to my favorite song once a day.
- ☐ Stretch for ten minutes in the morning.
- ☐ Try a new physical activity this week
- ☐ Commit to standing or walking while on a phone call.
- ☐ Use the stairs instead of the elevator at least once a day.
- ☐ Watch people moving to inspire you while being in the park.
- ☐ Engage in a physical hobby (e.g., gardening, dancing) for fifteen minutes.
- ☐ Set a timer to remind myself to move or stretch every hour.

Your
own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity

Step 3:

Look at your goal. Is it overwhelming?

If so make it smaller, or increase the frequency you are asking yourself to do it at. Practice self accommodation.

Step 4:

When will you start? Be specific. (Monday morning)

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity

Step 5: Develop a Strategy to Support Yourself to Reach Goal:

How will I help myself reach this goal? (Select or write your strategy):

- ☐ Leave visual reminders.
- ☐ Use self-talk.
- ☐ Set a timer.
- ☐ Have an accountability buddy.
- ☐ Announce it on social media.
- ☐ Pair with a group member.
- Other : _____

Step 6: Staying Encouraged:

If I miss this goal, how can I stay motivated? (Select or write your encouragement strategy):

- ☐ Understand that setbacks happen and it's okay.
- ☐ Re-evaluate if the goal was too ambitious and adjust.
- ☐ Speak kind and encouraging words to myself.
- ☐ Seek support from my accountability buddy or group.
- ☐ Remember the reason I set this goal in the first place.

Your
own _____

Self Care Plan Worksheet

Group Activity

Self-reflection Questions

- When you hear the term "self-care," what are the first three things that come to mind?
- What is one self-care habit you've cultivated that has had the most positive impact on your life?
- Are there any aspects of self-care that feel particularly challenging because of ADHD?