

The 4 Pillars of Self-Care

Sleep, nutrition, physical activity and leisure recreation/recharge are behaviors that directly impact weight and health. Think of these as the 4 pillars of self-care. They are a target to come back to again and again.

If you have any questions, ask your care team.

Sustaining these behaviors over time is important for long term success with managing your weight and metabolic health. Protect the time you set aside for these behaviors. Set boundaries on outside demands in your life.

Set your goals for self-care

Set specific goals for improvement in each of these 4 pillars for self-care. Use the Setting Good Goals for Managing Your Weight handout as a guide for how to best set goals in each of these areas.

Sleep

Sleep helps you heal. It helps your body repair your heart and blood vessels. If you do not get enough sleep, over time, you will have a higher risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke. You also may have trouble making decisions, solving problems, controlling your emotions and behavior, and coping with change. A study found that people who increased their sleep from 6.5 hours or less to 8.5 hours per night ate 270 fewer calories each day.

Recommendation:

- Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.

Steps you can take to improve sleep (refer to the Good Sleep Habits handout):

Physical Movement

Movement reduces the risk for many health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Exercise may also improve mood. Physical activity stimulates brain chemicals that make you feel happy and more relaxed.

Increased sedentary time is linked to poorer metabolic health. Try to reduce the amount of time you are inactive. If you are inactive for long periods of time, you are more likely to have health problems. Work within your limits to move more regularly through the day.

Even 2 to 3 minutes of activity at a time can help your health. You do not have to change your clothes or go to the gym to move your body.

Some people are not able to meet the guidelines below. That is OK. Get started with where you are and work your way to the guidelines, if possible. Some activity is better than none.

For example, if your knees start to hurt after 3 minutes of walking, stop and rest. Later, do another 3 minutes. If you push yourself too much, you may find physical activity unpleasant. You may want to stop doing it. Try to keep your physical activity enjoyable. This is the best way to keep on doing it over time.

Here are the target guidelines. You may need to start slower and build up to them.

Recommendation:

- Do 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous intensity exercise.
- Do muscle-strengthening exercises 2 days per week.

Steps you can take to increase movement (refer to the Get Moving for Better Health handout):

Nutrition

Your body needs fuel to perform at its best. Be sure to follow your specific diet plan to make sure you are getting the correct nutrients. Eating the right foods will help boost your immune system. It will also help delay the effects of aging, and improve your concentration and mood. Good nutrition can ward off serious illnesses like heart disease and some types of cancer.

Your home is the base for your food environment. Try to keep nutritious, healthy foods at home. Limit the foods you have at home that are not good for managing your weight. If you do not have unhealthy foods around, you will eat less of them. The goal is to eat foods that are not good for managing your weight less often, not to eliminate them. Save the treats for outside the home (on occasion).

The foods you keep at home are an important part of being able to make the change to eat healthier. In a well-controlled experiment, people who had access to only unprocessed foods ate 500 fewer calories every day compared to those who had access to processed foods.

Recommendation:

- Keep plenty of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds without salt, beans/legumes, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products in your home.

- Limit your access to foods with high salt, fat, cholesterol and added sugars (such as pastry and pizza).
- Plan what foods you will eat outside your home. Take nutritious food with you to help with managing what you will be eating when you are away from home.

Steps you can take to eat better to support your weight and health:

Recreation/recharge

Your mind and body need positive experiences to have a sense of enjoyment and well-being. This is another form of fuel that will help you perform at your best. Enjoyment and relaxation reduce the body's uptake of stress related hormones. This reduces the amount of wear and tear on the body caused by stress.

Make it a priority to have time to relax, be with people you enjoy and do things you enjoy.

Recommendation:

- Plan and protect a regular time for people you enjoy and activities you enjoy. This can range from having a family game night each week to taking a weekly pottery class. Try to be consistent. That can be monthly, weekly or even daily activities that you enjoy and or find relaxing.

Steps you can take to make regular recreation and recharge time (refer to the Recharge and Relax handout):

Why the 4 pillars matter for metabolic health

Metabolic health is more than just having an ideal weight. It also includes keeping these factors in a healthy range:

- Blood sugar
- Triglycerides
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol
- Blood pressure
- Waist circumference (without using medications)

When any of the 4 pillars of self-care suffer for a length of time, metabolic health declines. Your ability to cope with stress that is going on in your life also suffers.

If you want to lose weight and keep the weight off, it is important to set up and protect time dedicated to the 4 pillars of self-care.

How to make self-care a priority

Good self-care habits can be the best tools you have for lasting health and well-being.

Good nutrition, better sleep, physical activity and time for recreation and recharge are important for your health. Do not try to make these things fit around the other demands on your time. Make the 4 pillars your top priority. Then plan the demands of life around them.

No matter how important the demands facing you are, you will move through those demands better if you work on your targets for self-care first. After that, you will be able to give your time and energy to the people and things you care about.

Set firm boundaries. As you set these boundaries, you will learn who is supportive of the process and who is not. Talk with friends and family about what you are working on and how they can support you. Find others who are already following good health behaviors (such as a walking group or book club) and join them.

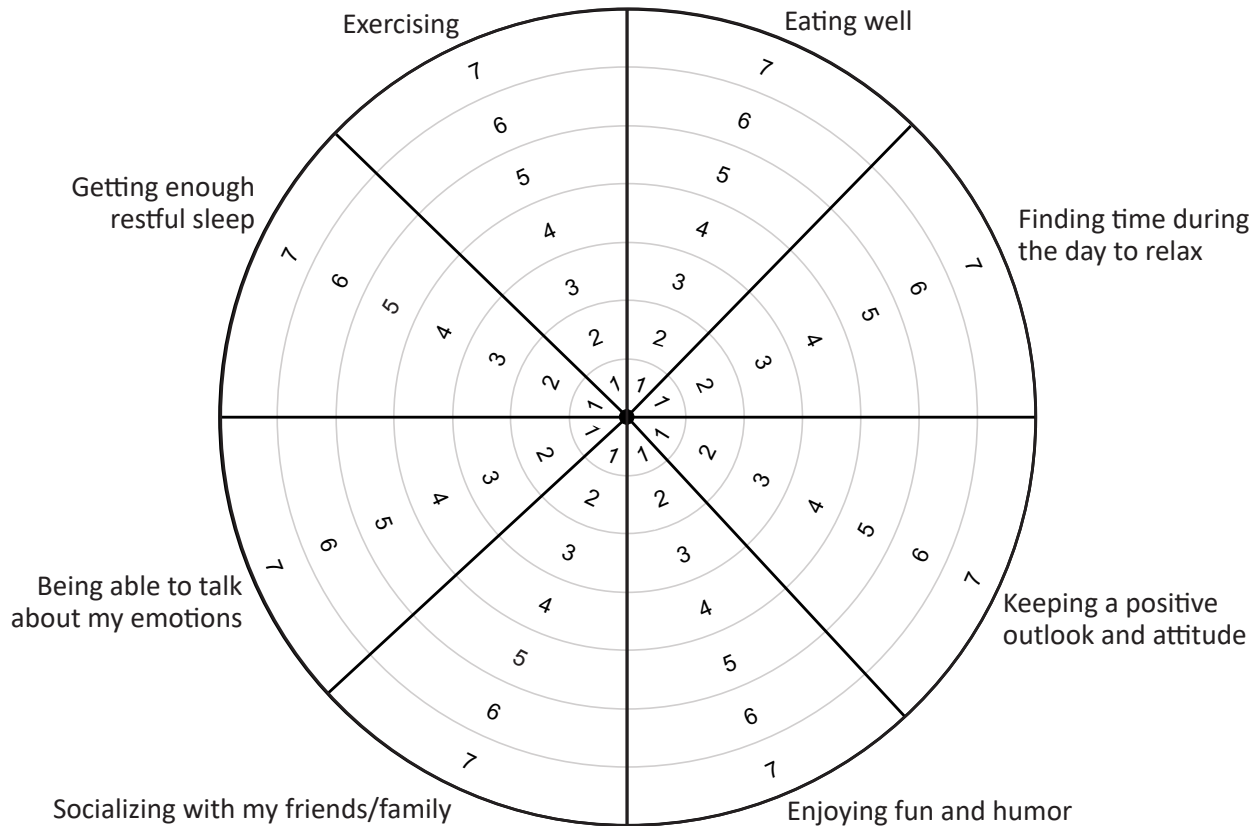
- People who do not have support for making changes from those around them will struggle to make and keep changes necessary to support metabolic health over time.
- People who surround themselves with a good support network are more likely to keep doing the things they need to do to reduce stress. They may also be able to come off medication for hypertension or diabetes. People with a support network will have a better chance of lasting weight loss.

Self-care scale

The following tool may help you see where you are on the self-care scale. Rate each self-care activity on a scale of 1 to 7.

- 1 = I am completely satisfied with this part of my life.
- 7 = I am completely dissatisfied with this part of my life.

The lower your score, the more satisfied you are with your self-care habits. Set your self-care goals to help you reach the center of the target.



Adapted from "The Bull's-Eye Values Survey: A Psychometric Evaluation," by T. Lundgren et al., 2012, *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 19, pp. 525. © 2012 Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

If you have any questions about self-care, please ask your care team.