

TREP Project Resource Brief

Focus on Movement to Advance your Physical Self-Care

Physical self-care is one of the most important forms of self-care and includes things like healthy diet, exercise, and seeing a doctor when needed, and although it can be easily implemented, it is often neglected. Physical self-care is all about listening to your body's needs, such as resting when you are feeling noticeable signs of tiredness. Caring for your physical health is best accomplished as part of your daily habits such as staying hydrated and staying active by walking, playing a sport, or taking an exercise class.

Physical self-care is essential because it helps you resist the negative effects of the stressors in life that can't be eliminated and must instead be managed. ***If exercise and healthy eating could be made into a pill, it would be considered a wonder drug*** because it provides an abundance of health benefits including reduced likelihood of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis. It also improves mood, reduces feelings of anxiety and depression, boosts self-confidence, and increases energy. And, unlike many pills, the cost is low and there are no side-effects.

The way you cope with stress is critical aspect of attending to your physical wellbeing.

Stress is both a psychological and physical experience. In situations where stress is a physical expression, your body begins to display distinct signs such as an increase in blood pressure, shallow breathing, and sweating. What you may not notice is the tensing of muscles such as those in your back and other areas of your body that can cause chronic pain or discomfort.

Your brain and your body are deeply connected, so if you want to take care of your mental health, you have to take care of your physical health.

Everyday stress, whether mental, emotional, or physical, creates tightness and pain in your body, and over time, symptoms can worsen to the point where medical care may be needed. Intentionally integrating moments for stretching into your day can give your muscles enough relief from the tension to prevent stress from harming your body.

We can all benefit from stretching and should consider doing it while walking around the classroom or school and while sitting at your desks. You can do any stretches that feel best for you or try a guided stretch like ***this one***.

Praise yourself for small changes and accomplishments; change is never easy; therefore, it is important to celebrate each step of the way.

6 Ways of Incorporating Physical Self-Care Into the School Day

1 Switch Up Your Lunch Routine
 Switch up your typical lunch routine! Instead of eating at your desk or in the breakroom, try eating outdoors whenever the weather permits. Eating your lunch outside allows you more time in nature; it's easy to forget just how much sitting in a beam of sunshine can boost your mood. It's also a great way to incorporate relaxation into your day, especially if you stick to a no complaining about students and colleagues during lunch time rule. Use this time to decompress by finding things to laugh about and build trust with colleagues.

2 Add Short Walks Outside
 Walking in nature allows you to get out of your head, take deep breaths, focus on pops of color, and beautiful aromas. During the school day you can take a 5-minute walk outside at the beginning of your break or prep period to organize your thoughts. This even works in winter, put on your coat and take a brisk 10-minute walk outside to clear your head. If you are an administrator, consider having meetings with individual faculty as walking meetings outside around the school. This can be helpful when you need to have a difficult conversation with a staff member. After work and on the weekend, find a nearby walking trail that allows you to go into the woods, as dense as you can find, to momentarily escape from the pressures of life.

3 Drink More Water
 We hear a lot about the health benefits of increasing our daily water intake. Remembering to drink enough water, especially as an educator, is vital because it helps to improve concentration and boost energy. However, it can also be hard to remember to care for yourself during the school day and make time for things like drinking water. Drink more water during the school day by bringing your own water bottle. Sounds simple, but it can help substantially in reaching your water consumption goals. Set a goal for how much water you want to drink by a certain time of the day. It's ok to need bathroom breaks to match your level of water intake.

4 Eat More Mindfully (and Nutritiously)
 Eating mindfully is the process by which you direct your full attention to how you are chewing and tasting your food, which involves eating more slowly and savoring the flavors and textures of the food. Within eating more mindfully, incorporate nutritious meals that have lots of fruits, vegetables, protein, and fiber to fuel your body. Eating mindfully turns the necessary act of nurturing your body into a time where you can also intentionally nurture your soul.

5 Remember to Stretch
 Moving your body is necessary to aid in proper blood flow and circulation. Add at least 1 to 2 minutes of stretching several times a day. Take notice of places in your body that feel tight and spend some time stretching them regularly. You may wish to explore these [Six Daily Stretches](#), specifically written with educators in mind and find time during the school day to use them. Try using one of these [Work Break Timer](#) apps to remind yourself to stretch.

6 Take Time to Just Breathe!
 This may seem obvious since we do this without thinking, but intentionally focusing on your breath can improve your blood pressure, sleep, stress, anxiety, and more. Find a regular time of day to just focus on your breath for at least 60 seconds. Put a reminder in your phone if it helps. Treat your mind and body to a few minutes of intentional breathing, there are numerous videos available on [Youtube](#). Try The Breathing App to advance your practice: download it from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

More on these self-care tips can be found in these articles:

- [50 Ideas for Physical Self-Care That Aren't Baths or Pedicures](#)
- [15 Physical Self-Care Activities Guaranteed To Boost Your Health](#)

Assessing and Advancing Your Physical Self-Care

There are at least 7 domains of self-care that you need to pay attention to:

Professional Self-Care
Psychological Self-Care

Physical Self-Care
Spiritual Self-Care
Relationship Self-Care

Emotional Self-Care
Environmental Self-Care

The table below can help you reflect on **physical self-care**. When you are finished, reflect over your responses and listen to your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority.

Rate your engagement with the following aspects of physical self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Eat healthy meals	0	1	2	3
Exercise regularly	0	1	2	3
Get regular preventative medical care	0	1	2	3
Take time off when sick	0	1	2	3
Drink enough water to stay hydrated	0	1	2	3
Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity	0	1	2	3
Get enough sleep	0	1	2	3
Maintain good dental hygiene	0	1	2	3
If you have a seated job, intentionally add movement into your work day	0	1	2	3
Use good smelling bath products so that daily showers become calming moments in your day	0	1	2	3

Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization; Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP; 1996

Reflect on your answers above to identify ways of strengthening your physical self-care. What is one element of physical self-care that you want to do more of to strengthen your wellbeing? _____
