

S.E.L.F. Care® is a simple, easy to remember acronym derived from illustrious scientific research institutions at Duke University, Harvard University, the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Johns Hopkins University on how to reduce stress.

S—Serenity Serenity is the opposite of stress. Learn a few simple practices that scientific research has proven lowers blood pressure, lowers heart rate, provides an immune boost and reduces stress hormones. These practices also help your body produce calming, healing hormones that de-stress the mind and body.

1. Be silent, pray, take deep, slow breaths and be grateful.
2. Repeat a positive affirmation. Make it something uplifting like “I am enough” or “Everything has a purpose.”
3. Listen to relaxing music.
4. Listen to nature sounds. Download bird, water or nature sounds to or take a walk in nature.
5. Visualize. Download a guided-imagery audio or create your own by imagining you are at your favorite place on earth. Visualize yourself there, smell this place, feel your presence, hear the sounds and touch the flora.

E—Exercise Research tells us that exercise produces endorphins and can be as effective as antidepressants in reducing stress and depression. It also helps to reduce your risk of contracting disease.

1. Walk. When you are stressed, walk around your office building or up and down the stairs.
2. Work out. Going to a gym, at home or away, reduces stress and makes you resilient to future stress. Download workouts, such as yoga or dance moves to your smartphone, iPad or computer.
3. Family exercise. Keep a basketball hoop or badminton net in the back yard. When the family is stressed over a situation, get outside and play or go for a walk. A family walk after dinner each night creates a time of communication, intimacy and play.

L—Love Sharing your stress and concerns helps the mind and body relax and renew. Research tells us there is a positive relationship between having a community and our health.

1. Meet with a friend or coworker. Being with someone you care about produces endorphins and oxytocin in your body.
2. Get in a group. Create a study group, a walking group, a gardening group, or a group around an interest you have. When you have friends that support you, there is less stress in your life.
3. Phone or text support. Keep at least three close friends or family on your phone list who you can call when you need support. It will help you de-stress to realize you are not alone and someone cares about you.

F—Food Food is medicine. Food is healing. Food regulates your moods, your sleep, and your health. Stress can be regulated by what you eat.

1. Eat breakfast, which increases metabolism, helps keep weight down, and helps with mood swings.
2. Eat omega 3's—such as fish and nuts—which help with anxiety, stress and depression.
3. Eat Vitamin B6—such as bananas, tuna, turkey, salmon, rice, sweet potatoes and sunflower seeds—which increases the serotonin in your body that calms and heals.

Take responsibility for your own S.E.L.F. Care and teach it to your spouse, children and co-workers. Practice S.E.L.F. Care every day and discover the benefits of a happy, healthier life. (from <https://caringmagazine.org/a-simple-acronym-for-healthy-living/>)