

Self-care tips

When we have a lot going on at school or home, it's sometimes easy to forget to take a few minutes for ourselves. Self-care is essential for our physical and mental well-being and can affect performance. Here are a few tips to help you take care of yourself.

- **Eat well.** Snack on fruits and veggies rather than processed or high-sugar foods. Eat two or three well-balanced meals daily that include protein, healthy carbs and veggies. Energy-boosting foods include nuts, fresh fruit, whole grain toast and dark chocolate.
- **Sleep.** Teens and young adults need seven to nine hours of sleep per night, though everyone is unique in how much sleep they need. Lack of sleep affects focus and concentration, among other areas of your mind and body.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise increases energy, motivation and, in turn, productivity. Even 10-30 minutes a day during busy times can make a difference. Find an exercise routine that works for you, whether it's walking, running, yoga or weights, and switch it up so it doesn't get boring. There are also many free fitness apps, such as 8fit, Freeletics and Daily Yoga.
- **Breathe.** In moments of stress or discomfort, take a moment to take in a few deep breaths (close your eyes if you want to), making sure that both your stomach and chest expand. Letting your lungs take in more oxygen helps ground and refocus you.
- **Prioritize.** If you're feeling overwhelmed, sit down and make a priority list, starting with the most urgent subject/task, second most urgent, third and so on. This helps to make your workload more manageable and ensures that the most important things get enough attention.
- **Take a break.** Having a work or study marathon? Take a break every hour to hour and a half for 10 minutes. Get some fresh air, stretch, exercise, eat, meditate ... whatever you need. If you think it will be hard to go back to work after that, set a timer on your phone to remind you. Short breaks are shown to improve attention.
- **Compare yourself to yourself.** Everyone has their own journey and you can't know what everybody else has been through. Appreciate where you are in your own life, how hard you've worked to get there and keep focused on what you want in life.
- **Know your support people.** When things get difficult, know who you can trust and can turn to for help and support, or who can make you laugh. It may be family, friends, a neighbour, a coach, a teacher, a counsellor; you don't have to feel alone.
- **Limit technology.** Social media can be a great way to keep in touch, socialize and get information. However, overexposure to the online world of instant gratification decreases concentration, creativity and social skills. Balance screen time with other things, like exercise and spending time (in person) with others.
- **Set realistic goals.** Set short-term and long-term goals. Reward yourself when you accomplish them.