Self-Care Assessment

Take a moment to consider the frequency with which you do the following acts of self-care. Rate using the scale below:

4 = Often
3 = Sometimes
2 = Rarely
1 = Are you kidding? It never even crossed my mind!

Physical Self-Care

__ Eat regularly (no skipping meals)
__ Eat healthfully
__ Exercise at least 30 minutes five times a week
__ Sleep 7–9 hours per night
__ Schedule regular preventative health-care appointments
__ Take time off when ill
__ Get massages or other body work
__ Do enjoyable physical work

Psychological Self-Care

__ Read a good novel or other non-work-related literature
__ Write in a journal
__ Develop or maintain a hobby
__ Make time for self-reflection
__ Seek the services of a counselor or therapist
__ Spend time outdoors
__ Say “no” to extra responsibilities when stressed
__ Allow the gift of receiving (instead of just giving)

Emotional Self-Care

__ Stay in contact with important people
__ Spend time with the people whose company is most comfortable
__ Practice supportive self-talk; speak kindly in internal thoughts
__ Allow both tears and laughter to erupt spontaneously
__ Play with children and animals
__ Identify comforting activities and seek them out
__ “Brag” to a trusted friend or family member; be proud of accomplishments
__ Express anger in a constructive way
Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for regular prayer, meditation, and reflection
- Seek community among friends, neighbors, or other gatherings
- Cherish optimism and hope
- Contribute to or participate in meaningful activities of choice
- Be open to inspiration
- Use ritual to celebrate milestones and to memorialize loved ones
- Be aware of the non-tangibles of life
- Listen to or create music

Workplace Self-Care

- Take time to eat lunch
- Make time to address both the physical and emotional needs of patients/co-workers
- Take time to chat and laugh with co-workers
- Seek regular supervision and mentoring
- Set limits with patients, families, and colleagues
- Find a project or task that is exciting and rewarding in which to be involved
- Decrease time spent comparing work performance to others
- Seek a support group – even if it is only one other person

Results:

121-160 You’re a self-care guru! Share the wisdom with everyone around you.
81-120 You’re on the right track. Get creative in the areas of least scoring.
41-80 Uh-oh. There’s some work to do. Hunker down and focus on yourself.
≤ 40 Are you still reading this? You’re about to self-destruct. Call 911!
Mindfulness and Self-Care

- When you awaken, express gratitude for your home…your work…your family or friends…your health or movement toward health
- Say “thank you” and “you’re welcome” frequently
- When caught up in a stressful situation, ask yourself: “What is the most important thing right now?”
- Take mini-stretch breaks throughout the day
- Be willing to say, “I don’t know”
- Ask for help and support when you need it
- Create a personal mission statement for your work
- Place a post-it at the nursing station or on your computer that says BREATHE
- Try substituting water or fruit juices for carbonated beverages. Monitor your intake of caffeine, alcohol, salt, and sugar
- Take a technology break—spend one day at home without answering the phone, email, or fax
- Take a media break—spend one day at home without listening to the radio news, watching TV, or reading the newspaper
- Place photos or pictures in your workplace of things or people who bring you joy
- For four hours, try and do one thing at a time; avoid multi-tasking
- Keep a humor file
- If you feel a little too busy…stop and take 5 conscious, deep, diaphragmatic breaths
- If you feel moderately busy…stop and take 10 conscious, deep, diaphragmatic breaths
- If you are excessively busy and feel overwhelmed…stop, sit down, close your eyes, take 10 conscious, deep, diaphragmatic breaths. Quiet your thoughts and gently remind yourself that you are capable of moving through this situation. Repeat. This will take < 5 minutes, and will help to restore your perspective and energy
- When you go to bed at night, express gratitude for the day you were given…for your home…your work…your family or friends…your health or movement toward health, something you learned…
Self-Care Strategies for Nurses

The goal of this session is to increase awareness of the impact of chronic stress on health care professionals and to give a brief overview of interventions or self-care behaviors that can reduce stress.

Nursing practice can be complex and requires nurses to use professional interventions and personal coping strategies in order to be effective. Professional self-care is a skills set that can be learned, and is just as important as all other nursing skill sets. This exercise is to assist you to think about personal coping strategies that support a healthy lifestyle and to offer education on self-care to fellow nurses and staff such as nursing assistants and others.

“When we attend to ourselves with compassion and mercy, more healing is made available for others.”

--Wayne Muller

Significance of Self-Care

Nurses are excellent at nurturing their patients and taking care of others. Even when nurses are experiencing burnout symptoms, they do not lose empathy for their patients (Kash, et. al., 2000). Recently, the term “compassion fatigue” has been used (Figley, 2002) to describe physical, spiritual, and emotional exhaustion in healthcare and others such as firemen, rescue workers, and other deeply caring individuals. However, nurses are not always as good at nurturing themselves, and can become physically and emotionally exhausted. Nurses often deal with stressors in the work environment at the expense of their own health. For example, there is a high frequency of smoking among nurses and nurses are at risk for obesity. Nurses are also at risk for low back pain, depression, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse (Sarna, 2004).

It is ideal to have nurses and others practice healthy, ongoing self-care while successfully continuing to care for others. Self-care that leads healing begins by employing such simple practices as regular exercise, healthy eating habits, enjoyable social activities, journaling, and restful sleep. You can find more information at http://www.compassionfatigue.org/

Stressors and Nurses:
Nursing practice exposes the nurse to many different stressors. French et al (2000) identified 9 workplace stressors that seem to affect nurses. These include:

- Conflict with physicians
- Inadequate preparation
- Problems with peers
- Difficulty with supervisors
- Discrimination, workload
- Uncertainty concerning treatment
- Dealing with death and dying
- Patients and their families
These potential stressors exist within the workplace and do not begin to describe the stressors that may exist for an individual outside the workplace and in the home. The consequences of prolonged and/or unmitigated stress include the development of burnout, deterioration in overall health as well as the use of coping mechanisms destructive to the individual (i.e., smoking and overeating).

The nursing profession attracts individuals who are interested in caring for others and helping people in times of great stress. Nurses find themselves attached to patients and, when those patients become terminally ill, often find it difficult to manage the physical and emotional impact. These physical and emotional consequences can lead to compassion fatigue or burnout (Kash et al., 2000). Nurses frequently deal with this stress at the expense of their own health. Nothing in the usual curriculum in nursing schools or orientation programs in most hospitals is directed toward helping nurse’s deal with job-related stress. Burnout is described as a state of profound physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. There are three principle symptoms of burnout identified by Maslach and Jackson (1996). They are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased feelings of personal accomplishment.

The literature suggests that programs that use the personal approach to wellness may be more successful than those that attempt to modify environmental factors (Kash et al., 2000). By facilitating the individual’s preparation of a wellness strategy, the impact of stressful professional circumstances can be mitigated.

**Proactive Choices for Well Being**

It is important to identify your own wellness strategies and think about how to maximize your well-being to prevent the debilitating effects of chronic stress. Chronic stress leads to burnout, which includes physical and emotional exhaustion, decreased empathy, decreased sense of accomplishment and staff turnover (Kash et al., 2000). Waiting until you are already on the verge of burnout can lead to health problems, resignation, or disability. High stress leading to burnout also contributes to staff turnover.

**Interventions Daily Stress Diary:**
Self-monitoring helps change behavior. Awareness, which is increased with self-monitoring, leads to change and growth. Keeping a “stress diary” can help with self-monitoring and planning for changes to promote self-care.

**Stress Diary**
Keeping a stress diary for a week or two can help you identify the types of situations that are stressful for you and your responses to them. You may identify a pattern of behavior that you want to change.
Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Stressful Event</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>Rushing, late to work</td>
<td>frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Change in schedule</td>
<td>mild headache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Difficult patient</td>
<td>anger; neck tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Traffic; accident on freeway</td>
<td>moderate headache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>neck &amp; shoulder pain</td>
<td>anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Child not doing homework</td>
<td>frustration, depressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Daily Stress Response Diary**

Fill in the stress diary below for one week. Complete one row for each stressful situation you experience daily. You may want to make copies of this form for additional diary entries.

NOTE: The Root Cause column may be somewhat difficult at first. This piece of data is to capture your learning history that contributes to the current situation. For example, if you are feeling anxious talking to your boss (the stressor), the root cause of this anxiety may be anxious feelings you have had in the past with authority figures such as a parent or teacher. If you can’t think of a root cause, skip this column and go on to complete the rest of the worksheet. You can always go back and fill this in if you have an insight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Symptom of the Stress (How it was felt in your body)</th>
<th>Stressor (Cause or Situation)</th>
<th>Root cause (Underlying Reason)</th>
<th>Action (What you did to make the situation better)</th>
<th>Past Behavior (What did you do in the past?)</th>
<th>Options (What might you do differently in the future?)</th>
</tr>
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The Wellness Plan
Learning about your unique stress patterns can help you create a **plan of care**. This care plan – your wellness plan – is a **living document** that will change as you change. It is a **tool** that you will modify as you learn what works and doesn’t work for you over time.

Start thinking today about how you can create a personalized wellness plan that you can adhere to over time. Applying your strategies **consistently** is key to preventing stress overload and resulting burnout. Now is the time to make a firm commitment to take good care of you!

You might think about how you answered your self-care history form. What has worked for you in the past? Wellness strategies can include:

- Physical Activity
- Deep breathing and relaxation skills
- Art therapy techniques
- Classical music
- Social support
- Meditation/prayer
- Hobbies
- Humor
- Positive self-talk and reframing
- Church and community activities
- Family fun time
- Learning something new of interest
- Massage
- Yoga
- Mindfulness
- Playing with children/pet

It is helpful to think of strategies that will work for you in these **5 domains**:

**The Five Domains of Wellness**

- Physical (e.g., walking, swimming, dancing)
- Mental (e.g., learning something new; positive self-talk)
- Emotional (e.g., expressing feelings through art or journal)
- Social (e.g., connecting with family, friends regularly)
- Spiritual (e.g., prayer/meditation; being in nature)

On the next page is a poem about self-care. You are invited to read this poem, and then write a self-reflection on how the poem applies to you.
Physical Activity & Spiritual Practice for Stress Reduction, Health and Well Being

Physical Activity:
When you are in a stressed “fight or flight” state, exercise is a natural outlet to help restore your body to its normal state. “Good” chemicals, such as endorphins are released.

Aerobic exercise, such as walking, biking, dancing and swimming:
• Strengthens your cardiovascular system
• Remember – walking is free. 😊
• Increases your stamina
• Helps regulate blood pressure
• Helps regulate blood sugar
• Helps you work off “emotional steam”
• Relieves chronic tension
• Decreases feelings of depression and anxiety
• Helps you sleep better (caution: aerobic exercise should not be done 2 hours before bedtime; exercise in the morning, afternoon or early evening)

Stretching exercise, such as yoga, tai chi, pilates, or general stretching routine:
• Helps you relax
• Relieves chronic tension
• Decreases feelings of depression and anxiety
• Improves your circulation
• Increases your muscle strength and tone
• Helps with joint mobility
• Helps you sleep better if done before bedtime
• Great way to start the day

Creating time to exercise:
• Set up a schedule of at least 3 times per week.
• Decide what days and times are best.
• Use music to help motivate you.
• Exercise with a friend if you need support.

Familiar excuses:
• I’m too tired.
• Exercise is boring.
• I walk a lot at work.
**Spirituality and Well Being:**

Spirituality means feeling centered, connected with a higher power or feeling that life has meaning and purpose. It may include religious practices or rituals. It usually includes some type of quiet time. We all have a need to express ourselves spiritually. However, the manner in which we do so is very individual, could be spending time in nature, etc.

Think about what is important to you and how you may already be experiencing meaning and purpose. Think about what would be helpful to you in expressing your spirituality consistently.

**Examples of Spiritual Practice:**
- Meditation/reflection/Prayer
- Quiet reflection time walking or being in nature
- Forgiveness
- Gratitude Journal
- Spiritual or inspirational reading
- Spiritual group/services/classes/volunteer work
- Singing
- Yoga/Tai Chi/Reiki
Imagine the center of this wheel is zero, in each category place a dot at how fulfilled you are in that category, at the outer edge would be 100% fulfillment.

Connect your dots to see where strengths and opportunities lie. Choose one area and make a goal for the upcoming year.

- Write down one area you are inspired to work on.
- What is your overall goal?
- Write down one thing you can implement into your lifestyle to help you achieve your goal. You may choose more, but no more than three changes.
- Little steps are great big steps in the change process.