



## ***Self-Care and Mindfulness***

2020 was quite the year! Along with the normal stressors of life came a bucket load of others. This unfortunately made it even more difficult to stop and focus on personal self-care and be mindful of what's needed for optimal overall health.

Many factors influence our overall health. Where we live, the environment, genetics, income and education level, friends and family relationships, the media, and personal characteristics and behaviors all have a large impact. A number of these we can't change – we can't pick our parents' genes, change the weather for warm, sunny walks each day, or reverse the childhood experiences that shaped our habits. However, we do have control over how we choose to deal with these influences, and that's where self-care and mindfulness come in.

Self-care is basically paying attention to supporting your own health – physical, mental and spiritual. It's extremely important for our own well-being as well as those who rely on us. Although prioritizing it may sound like common sense, it is often the first thing to get set aside, especially when we find ourselves in challenging situations. However, even minimal amounts done intentionally and consistently can create positive outcomes.

**Self-care can be divided into 8 dimensions** – Emotional, Environmental, Financial, Intellectual, Occupational, Physical, Social and Spiritual. Following are a few suggestions to consider in each dimension. What works for one person may not work for another, so find the best fit for you.

**Emotional** – talk to someone, journal, read, listen to music, do something artistic, laugh, take a nap, hug someone, take a walk, watch something that fits your mood or does the opposite, spend time with your pet, bake, swim, take a bath, get a massage

**Environmental** – breathe in fresh air, enjoy the sun, go star gazing, pick up litter, recycle, redesign a room, go for a drive

**Financial** – create a spending plan, open a savings account, cut back on unnecessary purchases, ask for a raise, invest, compare costs, shop the second hand stores first

**Intellectual** – build a puzzle, try something new, read, listen to audiobooks, take a class, watch documentaries, be curious, be mindful of the world around you

**Occupational** – update your resume, learn a trade, train for a promotion, take on a task you enjoy, be a mentor, be a spokesperson

**Physical** – be active daily, eat healthy, get an annual checkup, see the dentist, get adequate sleep (7-9 hours), take prescribed medications, see the doctor when needed, and avoid drugs and alcohol

**Social** – spend time with friends and family, keep in contact with old friends, volunteer, have fun, laugh, go out, be positive, connect through healthy social media use, join a book club

**Spiritual** – meditate, pray, be mindful, help those in need, reflect, do right by others, visit a meaningful site, look to your higher power for support, be kind to one another, practice yoga

Mindfulness can be a very helpful practice to support self-care. It essentially means being fully aware of what we are doing and where we are in a relaxed and undistracted state. Whenever you bring awareness to what you are directly experiencing through your senses, thoughts and emotions, you are being mindful.

Mindful eating is one way to apply mindfulness. This involves paying attention to hunger cues, tastes, textures, colors and just overall being in tune with your food. Mindful eating helps us to eat to satisfaction rather than to the point of being overly full. It can also increase satisfaction and enjoyment of foods by taking the time to eat slowly and really consider what we are tasting, hearing, smelling, seeing and feeling. Following are some strategy examples:

- Use a Hunger Scale to determine your hunger level as a number between 1 and 10 with 1 representing hunger to the point of starving and wanting to eat everything in sight and 10 representing feeling uncomfortably full.

Starving & light headed	Stomach empty & growling	Stomach feels empty	Starting to feel hungry	Don't feel hungry or full	Slightly satisfied	Almost satisfied	Satisfied & content	Feel too full (stuffed)	Ate way to much & don't feel well
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Turn off or silence your devices so you can eat without interruptions.
- Don't eat straight out of the container or bag. Consider what you plan to eat and portion it out before you start eating.
- Serve your food on a smaller plate, bowl or glass to help prevent your perceptions of servings to not be enough which can lead to overeating.
- Take a moment to appreciate the food in front of you.
- Use all of your senses to note appearances, aromas, textures, flavors and sounds of your food.
- As you eat, note the basic tastes you are experiencing – bitter, sweet, salty, sour, umami.
- Pay attention to the texture – crunchy, soft, dry, moist, and chewy.
- Set your fork down between bites to help slow your pace. It takes 15-20 minutes for our brains to catch up with our stomachs and signal we are full.

Resources:

Mindful: <https://www.mindful.org/6-ways-practice-mindful-eating/>

Harvard Health Publishing: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/8-steps-to-mindful-eating>

“Diabetes Spectrum”, American Diabetes Association:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5556586/>

“Self Care and Wellness: Taking Care of Yourself So You Can Be Your Best,” Ferris State University:  
<https://www.ferris.edu/RSS/eccc/tools/wellness.htm>



# AHW Lesson Activities

## *Live More, Stress Less*

### **“Applying the Lesson”**

*Choose one of the following activities to apply what you learned about your health and your healthy goal setting. Write a short response (3 to 5 sentences) to describe what you did and learned from the activity selected. Report your Applying the Lesson results by Online form, email, fax or hard copy to your county Extension Office.*

**Option 1:** Apply the Hunger Scale for a whole day and discuss how it was helpful, what was challenging, when it worked, when it did not work, and thoughts on continuing to use it.

**Option 2:** Reflect on your commitment to self-care. Are there dimensions you need to focus on more? If so, how do you plan to do that?

**Option 3:** Choose a meal to practice mindful eating. Incorporate the tips listed in the lesson. What did you notice? What were some positive aspects of mindful eating? What were some challenges with mindful eating?