

# Self-Care



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*"Where you tend a rose...a thistle cannot grow." - The Secret Garden*

When asked by doctors, family, or friends, "How are you doing? Are you taking care of yourself?" What is your response? Do you answer the way that most of us do?... "I am fine." At one point or another, most of us with vasculitis have been guilty of saying we are fine when we are not. Often, we do not take the small steps to help us maintain our well-being. On the one hand, we are hardwired to believe that self-care is selfishness or self-indulgence, while on the other, we rely on our doctors and parents to take care of us. Although physicians and parents play a significant role in our care, it is vital to understand the **importance of** self-care and how you can nurture your mental well-being. Vasculitis requires not just medical intervention but behavioral intervention as well.

## **What Does Self-Care Mean?**

Self-care is the purposeful engagement in activities or strategies that promote healthy functioning and improved well-being. Essentially, it is the active participation in your care or conscious act you take to boost your physical, mental, and emotional health

## **Why It is So Important**

Self-care is necessary for everyone, but this is especially true for those affected by Vasculitis. It is an essential aspect of taking an active role in your well-being, particularly during periods of flares or high stress. Managing your conditions and its burden on you is critical of your journey.

It is important to note that Self-care looks different and feels different to every person. Factors such as experience with the disease, coping skills, motivation, confidence, habits, cognition, support from others, and access to care can influence self-care.

# Self-care Tips

<b>Arm Yourself with Information</b>	Take time to read about your diagnosis and treatment options, as it helps to understand what you are dealing with. Also, talk to your doctors, social worker, parents and caregivers about your fears and concerns.
<b>Take One Day at a Time</b>	Many young people often feel a loss of control after a diagnosis. Try prioritizing the things you need to get done each day; this will help you lessen a feeling of not being in control. Work towards accepting the new “normal” as you experience changes in your daily routine and social time.
<b>Find Support</b>	Support groups are the perfect place to talk with other young people impacted by vasculitis; they provide encouragement and offer an opportunity to discuss anxieties and concerns with others who share the same experiences. Having a place to exchange information and advice may provide a sense of control and reduce feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.
<b>Give Your Mind a Break</b>	Renew your mental energy with activities such as meditation, spending time with friends or family, watching a favorite television program, or reading a book. This quiet or downtime is necessary to help you cope better with the fatigue and stressors of vasculitis.
<b>Manage fatigue</b>	Fatigue is very common in anyone with vasculitis and often begins before diagnosis and may persist even during or after treatment. Pay attention to what is taking up your energy. Listen to your body, rest when needed, and have clear boundaries. Learn to say “No.” You can use the “spoon theory” to help you manage your time. <a href="https://www.goodrx.com/health-topic/mental-health/spoon-theory">https://www.goodrx.com/health-topic/mental-health/spoon-theory</a>
<b>Practice good sleep hygiene</b>	sleep deprivation is detrimental to a person’s thinking and physical and emotional state. It’s not easy fitting this into a schedule filled with academic, social, and recreational activities; when trying to manage the impact of vasculitis, a shift to healthy sleep hygiene is essential. To improve your sleep quality, try and go to bed at the same time every night. Use some calming techniques to help you fall asleep if you need to.
<b>Cultivate a Positive Attitude</b>	Having a positive attitude can help set the tone for all you do. You may not control what happens to you, but you can change how you react. To help you cope, talk with other young people with vasculitis. You may also

	wish to speak with friends, religious or spiritual advisors, counselors, or healthcare professionals.
<b>Recognize your emotions as valid</b>	<p>Whatever you are feeling, grief, exhaustion, anxiety, fear, or anything else, is OK. Permit yourself to feel what you feel. Recognize those feelings and acknowledge that they may be different than anyone else who has vasculitis and that it is OK.</p> <p>Note, sometimes self-care is allowing yourself to feel sad or angry; it is ok to have these emotions and let them out. You can write about your feelings, which may help you process what you are feeling.</p>
<b>Learn breathing strategies</b>	<p>The stress from having vasculitis and treatment can be overwhelming at times. It is vital to slow down. Practice calming your system down with just a few breaths. Breathing affects the whole body; it increases feelings of calmness and relaxation. This relaxation leads to a decrease in the feelings of pain.</p> <p>You can start by engaging in breathing exercises for about 2 minutes wherever you are. Close your eyes and breathe deeply - your abdomen should rise, but your shoulders should not. Count to four, then slowly release your breath. Do this whenever you need to feel more relaxed or focused.</p>
<b>Explore Mindfulness Stress-management Techniques</b>	<p>Studies have shown that mindfulness has benefits for the mind. There are so many ways you can incorporate mindfulness into your life. Meditation, yoga, Pilates, listening to music, or simply breathing deeply are great ways to reduce your stress.</p>
<b>Find a way to express yourself</b>	<p>It may be difficult for some friends and family to understand what you are going through unless they have gone through it. It is important to find ways to express yourself in a way that allows you to feel heard and get the support you need. Guided imagery, healing therapies, and creative outlets such as drawing, painting, poetry, photography, music, or dance all can lower stress, as well. This can also be taking private time to collect your thoughts, starting a blog, or keeping a private journal. The key here is finding a way to channel your emotional state in positive ways.</p>
<b>Exercise and eat healthy</b>	<p>The benefits of exercise are well proven for both the mind and the body. Do light walks or other activities when you can. Get in the habit of moving daily. Eat a healthy and balanced meal</p>
<b>Prioritize</b>	<p>Make a plan of action by listing your schoolwork and personal priorities and then deciding what can be postponed. You can also assign time to different tasks in a way that will make your schoolwork seem less overwhelming.</p>
<b>Try something new</b>	<p>Illness can take a toll on your mental health. It's essential to try to reduce stress by doing things you enjoy, but also consider trying something new that is rewarding and maybe a little exciting for you</p>

<b>Set Limits</b>	Recognize your strengths and weaknesses. Know what you can handle on your own and when it's time to ask for help. There is no shame in acknowledging your limits. It is better to ask for help instead of getting burned out. It is also a good idea to practice the art of saying "No," do not agree to everything to please your friends or family member.
<b>Carve out 'me time'</b>	'Me time' is different from reading, exercising, or even taking up a hobby. It is important to take time just to be tuned to yourself. It is about really relaxing and, essentially, doing nothing. Try sitting with yourself, running a bath, or taking a long shower with some classical music.
<b>Appreciate nature</b>	Take time to enjoy nature and the things around you. Find a spot to appreciate the sunrise or sunset. Take a walk in the park, ride a bike in the park, go swimming or take a walk in the neighbourhood. There is something about the way we embrace nature that makes us feel good.
<b>Consider having regular therapy sessions with a Professional</b>	Whether it is a counsellor, social worker, or psychologist, it may be a good idea to have a space that is yours to talk about your thoughts and feelings and gain strategies for coping.