

# Workplace Wellness



## I Don't Have Time: You Are Either Engaging in Self-Care or Self-Neglect

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In the dental hygiene profession, we talk a lot about self-care due to the physical and emotional demands of our day-to-day work. Here are three challenges that arise:

1. What really is **self-care**?
2. What if I **don't have time** for self-care?
3. What if I **don't value myself enough to prioritize** self-care?

**Here's the truth:  
the opposite of self-care is self-neglect.**

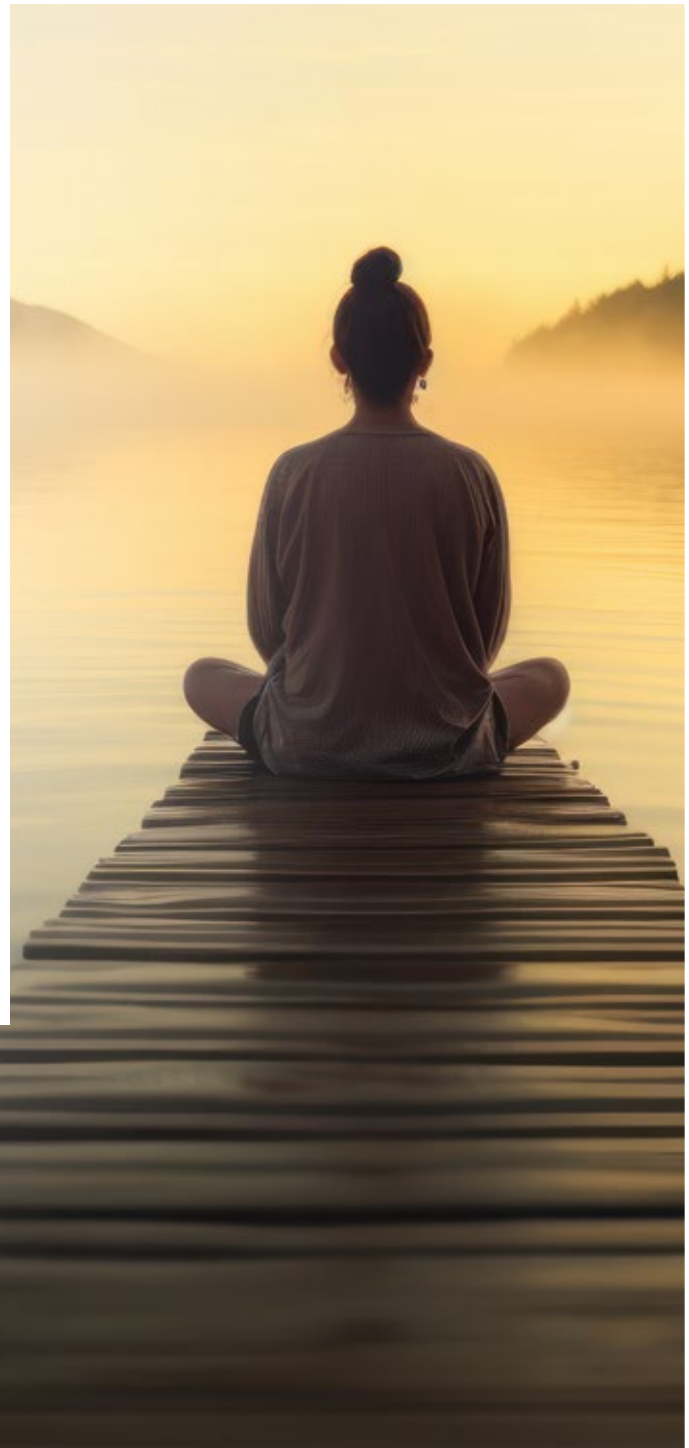
"Self-care" may seem like a buzzword, but it's vitally important we work towards it and, at a minimum, not neglect what we most need.

### **WHAT IS SELF-CARE ANYWAY?**

Self-care, in its most basic form, is the intentional practice of taking action to maintain or improve your physical, emotional, and mental health.

It's not a question of whether we practise self-care; it's how often, what action we take, and whether we need to amp up those intentional actions.

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## &gt;&gt;&gt;&gt; Workplace Wellness...cont'd

**WHAT SELF-CARE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO PRIORITIZE?**

If you practise anything on this list, even a little, you're working on self-care. It also helps you to know that if you pick even one to try or do more of than you are doing now (e.g., get to bed 15 minutes earlier to get toward that 7 to 9 hours of sleep), you're putting your well-being higher on the list.



1. **Get enough sleep:** Research shows 7 to 9 hours of sleep significantly affects physical and mental health.



2. **Eat healthily:** We need a balanced diet (i.e., lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats) to function well.



3. **Exercise regularly:** We need to engage in physical activity regularly, and the great news is, it's whatever you enjoy (walking, running, yoga, doing TikTok dances).



4. **Practise mindfulness:** We can engage in meditation, deep breathing or visualization (even doing the dishes and letting your mind wander apparently counts!).



5. **Get outside:** Spending time in nature can improve mood and reduce stress.



6. **Connect with others:** Who are your "people"? Family, friends, club members, besties at work, fellow volunteers? And how can you spend more time with them?



7. **Take breaks:** Even small breaks to rest and recharge help, especially when you do something you enjoy and find relaxing.



8. **Set boundaries:** Boundaries can be as small as saying "no" more and prioritizing *your* needs.



9. **Practise self-compassion:** Don't think or say something about yourself you wouldn't say to a bestie. Instead, recognize your strengths, accomplishments, and the fact you're doing the best you can.



10. **Seek support:** Reach out to trusted friends, family or a professional if you need support or guidance. Make use of CDHA's member and family assistance program, offered through Homewood Health ([cdha.ca/Homewood](https://cdha.ca/Homewood)).

## WHAT IF I DON'T VALUE MYSELF ENOUGH TO PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE?

We can all agree that we should do the things on this list, that we deserve it. However, when it comes to giving this attention to ourselves, we tend to make it more conditional (after work, once I have caught up on the bills, when the kids go to bed, on vacation...).



## WHAT IS SELF-NEGLECT?

Self-neglect involves neglecting one's own physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Would you neglect someone who depends on you? Your kids, clients, colleagues? You would try to do everything in your power not to neglect them! So why would neglecting ourselves be more acceptable than neglecting others?

Here are four sure signs of self-neglect:

1. **Ignoring physical health needs:** not getting enough sleep, not eating healthy foods or not getting enough exercise or stretching. Your body is what allows you to perform.
2. **Ignoring emotional needs,** such as not expressing feelings, not seeking support when needed or not engaging in activities that bring joy. How often are we emotionally spent and ignore it, or worse, judge our needs as wrong, bad, and unjustified?
3. **Engaging in self-destructive behaviours,** such as substance abuse or risky behaviours. If you're worried about the choices you've been making to cope, you deserve someone to help you. When you address these behaviours, more self-compassion can follow.
4. **Prioritizing the needs of others over one's own needs,** to the point of neglecting oneself. If everyone is focused externally on what others need, who is focusing inward?

Self-neglect may not have gotten its claws into you yet, so let's not let these things go unaddressed, as it could lead to harmful negative consequences down the road.

If you are worried about your own or others' physical and emotional exhaustion, burnout, and stress, it's time to think about what can be done and, more importantly, why it must be done.